

## Jesuit Fish in Chinese Nets: Athanasius Kircher and the Translation of the Nestorian Tablet

*I have also adjoined another Exposition avoiding of the Chinesian Phrase, not so accustomed unto our Ears, and that for the more suitable apprehending of the Genuine sense of the Table; and this I did the rather that I might not seem to omit any thing by which the Monument might receive the greater Illustration.*

—Athanasius Kircher, *China Illustrata*<sup>1</sup>

得魚而忘荃

*When you get the fish, you forget the net.*

—Zhuangzi 莊子<sup>2</sup>

### A Cornerstone of Sinography

IN 1625, IN THE OUTSKIRTS of Xi'an, workers were digging a trench to lay the foundation for a wall when their tools clunked against a nine-foot, two-ton, millennium-old tablet whose inscription told a remarkable story about all-but-forgotten Christians in China that would launch more than three hundred years of almost obsessive translation, interpretation, and invective among (mostly Christian) sinologists, sinophiles, and sinophobes the world over.<sup>3</sup> What made the discovery so astonishing is that, ever since Matteo Ricci's arrival decades earlier, the Jesuits had been resolutely seeking some evidence of lost Christians in China based largely on legends that St. Thomas the Apostle had evangelized there as well as on the many sightings of Nestorian Christians by Marco Polo; yet all that they had been able to uncover were little more than rumors. Then, as if in response to their prayers, a perfectly preserved Tang dynasty monument rose from the ground, engraved with a cross and describing a certain "luminous teaching" (*jǐng jiào* 景教), which was undeniably Christianity, in beautiful Chinese rendered in exquisite calligraphy. To everyone's wonder, the tablet (dated 781) not only recorded the arrival

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**ABSTRACT** This essay offers a "sinographic" reading of Athanasius Kircher's bilingual critical edition of a famous Tang dynasty monument (discovered in 1625) about Nestorian Christians, which frames the material in *China Illustrata* (1667). The author argues that Kircher's mode of translation is a doctrinal polemic that attempts to reconstruct an imaginary originary text from the Chinese inscription in order to contain unorthodox meanings that interfere with the Jesuit identity that is positively projected onto the stone. / **REPRESENTATIONS** 87. Summer 2004 © The Regents of the University of California. ISSN 0734-6018, electronic ISSN 1533-855X, pages 00–00. All rights reserved. Direct requests for permission to photocopy or reproduce article content to the University of California Press at [www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm](http://www.ucpress.edu/journals/rights.htm).

of Syriac-speaking missionaries in China in 635 led by a priest called Aluoben 阿羅本 but also preserved an imperial edict issued in 638 by the famous Tang Emperor Tai Zong 太宗 (627–49) granting permission for the priests of this luminous doctrine to establish a church in the capital.<sup>4</sup> The Jesuits hailed it as a providential sign in favor of their mission in the East and immediately set about translating it to spread the news.<sup>5</sup>

Now commonly known as the Nestorian Monument, Tablet, or Stele of Xi'an(fu) 西安(府), this famous stone is properly called by the nine large characters heading it: *Daqin Jingjiao liuxing zhongguo bei* 大秦景教流行中國碑 (Stele on the introduction of the Luminous Religion of *Daqin* into China)—where *Daqin* refers vaguely to the eastern Roman Empire, and “Luminous Religion” refers to Christianity as propagated by the Nestorians, who split from the orthodox church in the fifth century over a doctrinal matter and who distinguished themselves for spreading Christianity throughout Asia.<sup>6</sup> The stele is also unusual for bearing about a dozen lines in Chaldean or Syriac (a branch of Aramaic still used at the time by Nestorians as a clerical language) and the names of about seventy people associated with the churches in China ranking from bishop to deacon, written in both Syriac and Chinese. In the years since its discovery, generations of scholars have squabbled over its once-supposed inauthenticity and quibbled over its precise interpretation, making it one of the most retranslated of all Chinese texts, even to the point of becoming the sinological fetish *par excellence*.<sup>7</sup> Among educated Chinese, it is as well known as the Rosetta stone (fig. 1).

To those who know of Athanasius Kircher—the eccentric celebrity-polyhistor of the Jesuit Society and world-renowned expert on Egyptian hieroglyphics two centuries before their decipherment, whom Thomas Browne, enemy of vulgar errors, called “that eminent example of industrious Learning” than whom “no man were likely to be a better *Oedipus*”—it will come as no surprise that when people thought of the monument for well more than a century, they thought of Kircher.<sup>8</sup> For, even though he knew no Chinese, it was Kircher who first brought widespread attention to the monument by slipping a translation of it into his major work on the relation of Coptic to Egyptian, *Prodromus Coptus sive Aegyptiacus* (1636); and it was Kircher who, returning to it three decades later, created for the monument the first bilingual “critical edition” of any Chinese text to be published in Europe for European readers, in his gorgeously printed *China Illustrated by Monuments both Sacred and Profane, as well as by Various Spectacles of Nature and Art, and by Descriptions of Other Memorable Things* (1667). Such a *Wunderkammer* title makes it easy for browsers to see the book simply as a collection of illustrated curiosities from the Orient, among which happens to be a stunning fold-out page of Chinese writing.<sup>9</sup> But, in an important sense, this impressive title thematizes how unabashedly China is “illustrated” first and foremost by means of this Christian-Chinese monument—“both Sacred and Profane”—which occupies the first section of the book and is, as Kircher immediately states in his “Preface to the Reader,” his reason for undertaking the work as



FIGURE 1. The Nestorian monument today. The stone is bracketed against a wall and protected with plexiglass at the Forest of Steles Museum in Xi'an. Photograph by the author.

a whole.<sup>10</sup> Despite the renewed interest in recent years in Kircher's eclectic expertise on a vast range of subjects (from magnetism to music, optics to hieroglyphics, botany to volcanology, cosmology to pharmacology, and Noah's ark to the Tower of Babel), there has been relatively little discussion of *China Illustrata*. No doubt the explanation is partly a disciplinary one: Most early modern scholars are judiciously cautious about approaching what seems to belong to the field of area studies (as though the accuracy of Kircher's work ought to be measured against a cultural object that is supposed to preexist), while most sinologists are reluctant to traffic in material that is so obviously fantastical in so many ways, and so thoroughly representative of everything against which the field of sinology has tried to define itself ever since, well, the works of Kircher.<sup>11</sup>

The objective of this essay is to outline the sinographic problematics of Kircher's critical edition of the monument as the necessary prolegomena to any reading of *China Illustrata*. My own readings proceed from the understanding that Kircher's edition is partly a sinological-doctrinal polemic aimed at figuring the stone as a proto-Jesuit historical relic by strategically rewriting in translation everything that does not conform to the Jesuit identity that is positively projected onto it. In this sense, Kircher's spectacle-filled compendium is chiefly a project of *self*-illustration—the providential saga of carrying the gospel into Asia, its Jesuit heroes, and what they found there—as metonymically represented by the sacred and profane monument, which the Jesuits were in a unique position to translate and interpret as the putative masters of an unparalleled combination of linguistic, cultural, and doctrinal understanding. Even the emblematic frontispiece of the book displays this combination of providence and self-promotion in its “Hall of Fame” genealogy of the China mission: The canonized cofounders of the Jesuit Society, St. Ignatius Loyola and St. Francis Xavier, appear floating above the two great figures of the China mission, Matteo Ricci and Adam Schall von Bell, who are holding open a map of China (that is, an “illustrated China” or miniature of the book itself) whose weight is supported by an angel, and which is labeled with the hotspots of Jesuit activity, most notably the site of the discovered monument, “Siganfu.” The frontispiece thus presents an emblem, not merely of an *illustrated China*, but of the Jesuits *illustrating themselves illustrating* China with divine assistance (fig. 2). Moreover, the first illustration proper within the book is a detailed double-page map of the whole of China that marks the location of “Siganfu” with the caption: “Locus ubi inventus lapis sino-Syriacus” (Place where the sino-Syriac stone was discovered). Since all of the illustrated marvels of the book are thus framed by the identificatory representation of the monument and by the implication of praise by association with the supposed miracle of its discovery, all of the disparate material of the book (including the Chinese, the Indian, the Mongolian, and the Tibetan) must be considered as at least potentially subsumed by the self-authenticating function of that framing apparatus. In sum, I would describe Kircher's sinological project here as the attempted reconstitution of a whole Self from an Other's Other.





FIGURE 2. The frontispiece to Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata* (Amsterdam, 1667). (Matteo Ricci is misidentified in this copy as "Kircherus.") Collection of the author.

## Kircher's Textual *Tabulae*: Tablet, Table, Tableau

What makes Kircher's presentation of the monument in *China Illustrata* unique is its four-fold critical apparatus, which consists of a copy of the inscription plus three tables of "interpretations":

- A. a *transcription* of the Chinese text, by "Mattheus," a Chinese convert: a large, foldout engraving of the inscription showing a grid of numbered characters arranged in numbered columns, which presents an image of the tablet (fig. 3);
- B. a *pronunciation table*, by Michel Boym, Kircher's chief informant on the inscription: a table of romanized spellings for the Chinese arranged in columns and numbered according to the grid (fig. 4);
- C. a *verbatim translation*, also by Boym: a word-for-word version of the Chinese with numbers from the grid placed in superscript over each Latin word (fig. 5);
- D. a *paraphrase*, by Kircher, from an earlier Italian translation, first printed alone in his *Prodromus Coptus*: a readable idiomatic Latin version with Kircher's occasional glosses on the text (fig. 6).<sup>12</sup>

As if describing one of the marvelous polygraphic language machines in his *Polygraphia Nova et Universalis* (1663), Kircher boasts that his ingenious device of tables allows any "Lector curiosus" to cross-reference any Chinese character in the inscription with its pronunciation, its literal meaning, and its contextual sense in the paraphrase.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, all three of the examples that Kircher uses for his demonstration contain errors of the most elementary kind, showing just how difficult it would be for someone who does not *already* know Chinese to use the critical apparatus, including the inventor himself.<sup>14</sup>

Moreover, the most fundamental errors are also built into the system itself, before one even begins to use it. Not recognizing that the inscription is written in parallel couplets, for example, Boym mistakes the very first column break as a break between clauses in the midst of the cosmogony, as follows (the "/" marks the column break, and the superscripted numbers precede the words over which they appear in the text):

[主 . . . ]  
鼓元風而生 / 二氣 , 暗空易而天地開

[<sup>41</sup>Dominus . . . ]  
<sup>46</sup>commovit <sup>50</sup>originis <sup>51</sup>spiritum <sup>52</sup>& <sup>53</sup>produxit. / 2. <sup>1</sup>Duas <sup>2</sup>mutationum causas (Sinicè dicuntur *ym* & *yam*, hoc est materia & forma) <sup>3</sup>obscurum <sup>4</sup>vacuum <sup>5</sup>mutavit, <sup>6</sup>& <sup>7</sup>coelum <sup>8</sup>terram <sup>9</sup>aperuit.

CHINESE: [Lord . . . ]  
Drummed up the primordial wind and created / the two *qi*;  
The dark emptiness transformed, and the heaven and earth separated.



FIGURE 3. Table 1: the foldout transcription of the text of the monument. The first of four *tabulae* in Kircher's critical apparatus, in *China Illustrata*, 12 f. Collection of the author.

## INTERPRETATIO I.

Qua

*Characterum Sinicorum, qui in Monumento Sinico continentur,  
pronuntiatio gemina per Latinos Characteres exprimitur.*

	7. Chui 8. Kul 9. Puy.	4. Kul 5. Lul 6. Hui	1. Tai 2. Gai 3. Kuli	
4. COL.	3. COL.	2. COL.	1. COLUMNA.	0.
1. ai	1. ai	1. li	1. yi	1. Kuli
2. ei	2. xi	2. hi	2. gi	2. hai
3. oei	2. chi	3. nei	3. chui	3. lei
4. pi	3. chui	4. chui	4. gi	3. lei
5. chui	4. hi	5. j	5. chui	4. chui
6. xui	5. mei	6. li	6. gi	4. chui
7. yi	6. mei	7. nei	7. gi	5. pui
8. mi	7. jui	8. gi	8. gi	6. xui
9. xui	8. pui	9. hui	9. li	7. pui
10. ai	9. xi	10. gi	10. ai	8. ai
11. hui	9. chi	11. jui	11. jui	
12. ai	10. xui	12. jui	12. ai	
13. hui	11. xi	13. li	13. gi	
14. li	12. j	14. chui	14. lei	9. Tai
15. jui	13. jui	15. yi	14. lei	9. Gai
16. xi	14. pi	16. ai	15. lei	10. xi
17. xui	15. li	17. xui	16. lei	11. xui
18. jui	16. xi	18. chui	17. li	12. lei
19. yi	17. li	19. xui	18. mei	12. Gai
20. fui	18. chui	20. ai	19. jui	13. ai
21. xui	19. hui	21. gi	20. jui	
22. hui	20. fuy	22. li	21. lei	
23. ai	21. hi	23. ai	22. lei	
24. ai	22. chui	24. gi	23. li	
25. xi	23. hui	25. jui	24. lei	
26. li	24. chui	26. ai	25. mei	
27. chui	25. fi	27. lei	26. chui	
28. xui	26. li	28. lei	27. lei	
29. jui	27. hui	29. chui	28. jui	
30. gi	28. ai	30. lei	29. ai	
31. chui	29. j	31. hui	30. chui	
32. xui	31. ai	32. hui	31. li	
33. ai	32. mei	33. jui	32. xui	
	33. lei			

B 3

34. lei

FIGURE 4. Table 2 (Interpretatio I): the pronunciation table, in *China Illustrata*, 13. Collection of author.

## PRÆFATIO.

*Expositus in precedenti Tabula terminis Sinicis, seu quod idem est, quomodo Characteres Sinici in Lapide comprehensi, Latine pronunciandi sunt; jam in sequenti Interpretatione, voces in precedenti expositas, pari numerorum correspondenti, exponemus. Ita autem res se habet.*

## INTERPRETATIO II.

*Verbalis Latina Monumenti Sino-Chaldaici.*

Tab. 3.  
Tab. 3.

De magna G<sup>o</sup> (Judæa videlicet) clarissime Leg<sup>is</sup> promulgata in Cui<sup>us</sup> hui<sup>us</sup>  
(id est, Sinarum Imperio) Monumentum.

c. Clarissime Leg<sup>is</sup> promulgata in Sina Lapis æternæ laudis & prologus.  
Ta<sup>g</sup>on (id est, Judææ) Ecclesie Sacerdos, Ka<sup>m</sup>on, retulit.

Columna  
prima

1. **P** Rincipium fuit semper idem, verum, quietum, primorum primum, & sine origine, necessario idem, intelligens & spirituale, positemorum positemum & excellentissimum existens, ordinavit cælorum polos, & fecit ex nihilo excellentissimè; perfecti omnium Sanctorum, pro origine adorant, quem ille solus personarum trium unica perfectissima substantia non habens principium, veritas Dominus *haley* statuit Crucem per pacificare quatuor partes Mundi, commovit originis spiritum & produxit.

Col. 2.

2. Dux mutacionum causas (Sinicè dicuntur *jm* & *jam*, hoc est, materia & forma) obicunum vacuum movavit, & cælum, terram aperuit, Solem, Lunam circumvolvavit, & diem noctem fecit, Ar-

tificæ operatus universas res. idem erigere voluit hominem, omnes donavit amabilissimam pacificæ unionis subordinationem (id est, iustitiam originalem) precipiebat quietem fluctibus maris, integra originis natura vacua humilique & non plena superbaque, sequi appetituum fluctuationem corde, de se, neque levissimè desiderabat, promanavit à *Sotat* (id est, Diabolo) extensus dolus, clam ornavit naturam puram & simplicem otiosa pace magnificam in

3. Illius permanentiæ medio odium Col. 3.  
occultavit simul per laudem malitiae ad intra, illud causavit ter centum sexies, docem quinque sectas, hiansi hominum loquebantur ordinem vestigionum contendentes texere regularum retia, aliqui monstrabant res creatas pro credendo princi-

FIGURE 5. Table 3 (Interpretatio II): the superscripted verbatim translation, 22. Collection of author.

## INTERPRETATIO III.

Sui

## DECLARATIO PARAPHRASTICA

*Inscriptionis Sinicae, primum è Sinico in Lusitanicam, ex hac in Italianam, & demum ex Italica in Latinam linguam de verbo ad verbum translata, ut sequitur.*

c. Declaratio del Xw Pw, vel ut Commentator ait, facta à Sacerdote Regni Judae, qui vocabatur Km Lem.

**I**deo itaque hoc modo, ille qui semper verus fuit & quietus, omnis expertus principi, intellectus profundissimi, & semper duraturi, excellentie potentia sua ex nihilo creavit res omnes, infinita maiestate sua & sanctitate fecit Sanctos. Hæc est essentia Divina, trina in personis, & in substantia una, Dominus noster, verus sine principio, *Oli, il yu* (quod in Chaldaeo idem ac *Elisha* significat) in figura Crucis fecit quatuor Mundi partes, commovit Cham, fecit duo Kur (hoc est, duas virtutes, seu duas qualitates dictas *logos*; Commentator habet, duo principia) fecit mutationem in abyſſo, id est, mutavit tenebras, comparavit coelum & terra, fecit ut Sol & Luna motibus suis noctem & diem causarentur, res omnes fabricatus est. Verum creando primum hominem ei præterea iustitiam largitus est originalem, dominum cum constituendo totius Universi, qui de sua natura primò vacuum erat & vili, seipſo plenus, intellectus plano & aequali, & sine misura nullum habens appetitum inordinatum.

**II.** Postquam verò Satanas fraudibus suis usus, effecit; ut Adamus id quod ex se & sua natura purum erat & perfectum, indiceret; hoc est, fecit ut multum in ipsam intrare inciperet perturbatura peccati, & huius suæ simplicitatis equalitatem & discordiam illa fraude intro-

duxit. Idcirco trecentis sexaginta quinque scētis unā post alteram obortis, unaqueque earum maximum quæm poterat numerum ad se traheret. Aliquæ creaturam Creatoris loco habebant. Alii principium rerum omnium vacuum ponebant, & ens reale (alludit ad hoc scēta Pagodum & Literatorum Sincensiam) quoniam illi asserunt, quod principium, & quo omnia prædiere, sit vacuum; quod idem illis est, ac subtile, sensibus imperceptibile, etiam in se reale sit & positivum principium. Literati verò dicunt, quod principium rerum non solum reale sit & positivum, sed præterea quod talis sit figuræ & corpulentia, ut sensibus comprehendi queat. Quidam sacrificiis quærebant beatitudinem. Quidam bonitate quadam gloriabantur ad decipiendos homines, qui in re omnem suam scientiam & industriam collocabant, omni diligētia & intentione suis affectibus servientes. Verum frustra laborabant & sine profectu, semper in pejus progredientes, quemadmodum contingit in qui è vase cretaceo ignem elicere volunt, obscuritatem addentes obscuritati, & hoc ipſo veram sententiam perdentes ad viam vitæ reverti nocēdentes.

**III.** Tunc una de Divinis personis sanctissimæ Trinitatis dicta Messias restringendo regendoque Majestatem suam, & se humane nature accommodando homo factus est. Quam ob rem

D 3

ad

FIGURE 6. Table 4 (Interpretatio III): the paraphrase, in *China Illustrata*, 29. Collection of author.

LATIN: [the Lord . . . ]

<sup>46</sup>moved <sup>50</sup>of origin <sup>51</sup>the spirit <sup>52</sup>and <sup>53</sup>brought forth. / 2. <sup>1</sup>The two <sup>2</sup>causes of changes (called by the Chinese *ym* & *yam*, that is, matter and form) <sup>3</sup>dark <sup>4</sup>void, [He] <sup>5</sup>changed; and heaven earth, [He] revealed.<sup>15</sup>

The comparison is admittedly rather dizzying to make, but what is important to note is that the syntactical configuration of the Chinese allows “the Lord” to act elliptically as the subject, not just of the first, but of all three verbs. In effect, Boym’s rendering transfers agency “back” to the Christian god for the changes wrought by “dark emptiness” and “heaven [and] earth”—which, at least grammatically, work *on their own* in the inscription, and both syntactically and philosophically work *as a result* of the two modes of *qi* 氣 (material energy), if not actually as those two modes of *qi* 氣, which are reduced in the gloss to “materia & forma.” Indeed, Kircher’s final paraphrase of this passage not only confirms this reading, but also completes the transfer of agency from *qi* 氣 to the Christian god, where it is thematized by a proliferation of active verbs: “[our Lord] *moved* Chaos, *he made* the two *Kīs* (that is, the two virtues, or two qualities called *Inyam*; as the Commentator has it, two principles) *he made* changes in the abyss, that is, *he changed* the darkness, *he formed* heaven & earth” (emphasis added).<sup>16</sup> Thus, Boym subtly reconstitutes an acceptably orthodox genesis by sifting out the traditional cosmological assumptions and associations of the Chinese text; and he does so by translating the passage *without altering the value or the placement of a single word*, so that a “curious reader” could theoretically cross-reference every character in this passage with perfect confidence.

I will say more about the epistemological function of this apparatus in a moment, but first I want to stress that this question of agency in the Creation was not simply a fine point of doctrine; it was a hot topic for the Jesuits in China, where the idea of a creation *ex nihilo* in a deliberate, divine act was difficult for many to believe.<sup>17</sup> The two interrelated beliefs that the Jesuits had to refute were: (1) that all things were created by the uncreated, omnipresent material energy *qi* 氣; and (2) that all created things were the products of natural processes involving the interaction of *yin* and *yang* in *qi* 氣.<sup>18</sup> This fundamental notion of being was represented by the aphorism *wan wu yi ti* 萬物一體: “all things are of one substance” or “the myriad things form one body”—an idea that the Jesuits were forced to overturn not only because it blasphemously implied that human beings form a unity with the divine, but also because it contradicted the idea of a creation *ex nihilo*. In fact, Ricci had explicitly contested these ideas in Chinese as early as the mid-1590s in his *Tianzhu shiyi* 天主實義 (True meaning of the lord of heaven), where he argues that *qi* 氣 is simply one of the four elements (air); that *yin* and *yang* are but accidental principles of being; and, most saliently, that “Heaven and earth cannot have created themselves, but must certainly have been produced by a creator, who is the one we call the Lord of Heaven” (天地不能自成, 定有所爲制作者, 即吾所謂天主也).<sup>19</sup> Furthermore, soon after the discovery of the monument, in 1628, Giulio



Aleni wrote a new pamphlet entirely devoted to the matter, the *Wanwu zhenyuan* 萬物真原 (The true origin of all things), whose fourth section—"The Primordial Material Energy Cannot Have Divided Heaven and Earth by Itself" (論元氣不能自分天地)—specifically addresses the point raised by the inscription.<sup>20</sup> Since Aleni seems to have based his work on Ricci's treatise, it is all the more interesting that his language actually echoes the inscription at this point more closely than it does Ricci. Thus, it seems that the authors of the stone inscription found what was to them an acceptable concession to the concept of an immanent, mechanistic material energy by letting the Christian god initiate the process—or, indeed, that they actually *understood* it that way—and that the Jesuits were at pains to roll back those concessions in their translations and commentaries nearly a thousand years later.<sup>21</sup> In other words, to anticipate my point, the Jesuits approached the inscription as though it were already a translation that needed "un-translating."

A blunter example is to be found in the very opening lines of the inscription where the Christian god is described as *zong xuan shu er zao hua* 惣玄樞而造化: the "one who *grasped* the *mysterious axis*, then *created* and *transformed*," or, less literally, the "one who *gathering* his *mysterious power*, *created*."<sup>22</sup> The first part of the phrase alludes to the ancient cosmological idea of a *shu* 樞 (axis or column) that once supported the sky and around which the early world turned, as in such Daoist classics as the *Book of Liezi* 列子 and the *Book of the Prince of Huai Nan* 淮南子. The second part of the phrase (*zao hua* 造化, "created" and "transformed") is borrowed from the *Daode jing* 道德經 (Tao Te Ching). For the transcription, Mattheus treats these two characters as a single term, which Boym in turn translates with a single word, "fecti" (he made). Astonishingly, Boym then slips in two more unnumbered words so that it reads: "fecti *ex nihilo*."<sup>23</sup> An "ex nihilo" *ex nihilo*. Kircher's paraphrase follows with "ex nihilo creavit res omnes" (he created all things ex nihilo).<sup>24</sup> Although it is considered bibliographic fact that Kircher's translation in *China Illustrata* was simply reprinted from the earlier *Prodromus Coptus*, nevertheless this "ex nihilo" was evidently important enough to be among the negligibly few changes that he did make, for the *Prodromus* text reads simply, "creavit res" (he created things).<sup>25</sup> Could it be that Boym learned something from making his verbatim translation of the cosmogony that led him to insist just a bit more on that point? Or was it Kircher who slipped that term into *both* texts long after Boym had surrendered his manuscript?

What is at issue here is not that the Jesuits may have at times strategically manipulated their translation of this semisacred and semiprofane text in order that it render a more doctrinally accurate meaning (which seems clear enough from my reading); but rather that, whereas the authors of the monument forged an expression of Christian ideas in what Haun Saussy has called the "workshop of equivalences"—where all interlinguistic handiwork is overdetermined, provisional, and tacitly unfinished—the Jesuits, for their part, may have appropriated the monument in order that it may express as fully as possible what they understood to be its "true meaning."<sup>26</sup> After describing the very different motives behind the apparent

agreement between Matteo Ricci and the Neo-Confucian convert Yang Tingyun on certain Christian concepts, Saussy proposes that we conceive of such intercultural convergences on the model of the pun, “that instant of ambiguity whereby two meanings are suspended in a single signifier and two speech communities can coincide in their language, although not in their frames of reference.”<sup>27</sup> This idea perfectly suits the Nestorian inscription, where the authors have constructed an elaborate series of such serious puns that involve multiple frames of reference. But the pun is precisely what is lost in translation in Kircher’s edition. To be more specific, I suggest that the sinographic problematic of translation at work here is that the Jesuits treat the inscription, not as an original Chinese text to be translated, but rather as an already-translated (corrupt) text whose (accurate) original must be reconstructed from it, on the model of those passages in lost Greek or Sanskrit texts that are philologically reconstructed from their only extant translations in Arabic and Chinese. In this case, however, the “original” text never existed, except perhaps by way of a third discourse based on pure language, pure truth.

One thinks here, of course, of Walter Benjamin’s famous idealizing theorization of the infinite translatability of sacred writing, of trying to let the “pure language” (*die reine Sprache*) shine through a translation regardless of the *meaning* of the original simply by rendering the language *so literally* that *sense* is sacrificed to the mysterious workings of *syntax*:

A real translation is transparent; it does not cover the original, does not block its light, but allows the pure language, as though reinforced by its own medium, to shine upon the original all the more fully. This may be achieved, above all, by a literal rendering of the syntax which proves words rather than sentences to be the primary element of the translator. . . . Where a text is identical with truth or dogma, where it is supposed to be “the true language” in all its literalness and without the mediation of meaning, this text is unconditionally translatable. . . . The interlinear version of the Scriptures is the prototype or ideal of all translation.<sup>28</sup>

The Messianic implications of Benjamin’s essay as a model for translation theory have been much criticized, but these passages are unusually apt here.<sup>29</sup> Indeed, I would argue that the true genius of Kircher’s critical apparatus is that, in order to take full advantage of the gridlike appearance of the Chinese text on the monument, it fuses two of the most compelling contemporary modes of textual representation—the interlinear verbatim translation (so suitable to the rendering of scriptures) and the *tableau* or “table/picture” of knowledge (so suitable to the displaying of collections)—and combines them with two sinological curiosities that the Jesuits had to their credit: the tonally marked romanization of Chinese first developed in the 1590s by Lazzaro Cattaneo and Diego Pantoja, and the coordinated numbering system more recently invented by Boym himself as a novelty for the bilingual commendatory verses that preface Kircher’s *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (1652).<sup>30</sup> In St. Jerome’s well-known letter to Pammachius (LVII) in which he defends his paraphrastic method of translation, he famously preferred to render *sensus de sensu*

or “sense for sense” (to be what Cicero had called an “orator” rather than a mere “interpreter”) and to reserve *verbum e verbo* or “word for word” translation for the rendering of sacred texts, of “mysteries.”<sup>31</sup> By providing both *verbum e verbo* and *sensus de sensu* versions, Kircher thus treats the monument as “both sacred and profane,” strategically authenticating the monument and its providential status while determining precisely how we are to understand it.

But Kircher also boasts that even his “paraphrase” is a “word-for-word” translation where the chain of languages through which it has passed, far from generating doubt about distortions along the way, actually seems to thematize the links of equivalency that enable unproblematic literal translation itself: “*A Paraphrastical Declaration of the Chinese Inscription, Translated word for word [de verbo ad verbum] first out of the Chinese Language into the Portuguese, out of that into Italian, and from the Italian into the Latine Tongue.*”<sup>32</sup> Moreover, by arranging these transcriptions and translations into “tables” (Kircher himself uses the word *tabula*) the goal seems to be what Michel Foucault calls the creation of the *tableau*: the graphically structured display of knowledge for the effect of transparency—of complete comprehensibility—without the troublesome mediation of argument or language.<sup>33</sup> As indicated by the opening epigraph, Kircher presents his paraphrase as if it were simply a supplement to the essential apparatus: “I have also adjoined another Exposition . . . avoiding of the *Chinesian* Phrase, not so accustomed unto our Ears, and that for the more suitable apprehending of the Genuine sense of the Table [*ad genuinos Tabulae sensus*].”<sup>34</sup> In his commentaries Kircher always quotes the paraphrase, while only rarely referring to an individual word in the verbatim version in the midst of a concentrated polemic, giving the system the feel of great utility and authority whenever he does. Thus, even though the verbatim version ensures the accuracy of the translation through its coordinated text, the very “*Chinesian* Phrase” in which it must appear is the measure of its inferiority to a properly nuanced version in the *European* phrase for conveying the “Genuine sense” of the inscription. The word “*tabula*” that John Ogilby renders here as “table” might best be understood as an irreducible *tablet-table-tableau*, suggesting that the patent, monumental, lapidary truth of the text as *tabula* may “receive the greater Illustration” of other *tabulae*. In sum, Kircher has created a sort of three-dimensional interlinear edition that refracts the model of original interlaced with translation into a series of ostensibly superimposed *tableaux*.

By contrast, we may briefly note that, at about the same time, Ignatius Acosta and Prospero Intorcetta began printing in China a bilingual edition of the four books of Confucius entitled *Sapientia Sinica* (1662) for the use of Jesuits studying both Chinese and the fundamentals of Confucian philosophy. Insofar as this edition crams Latin, Chinese, and pronunciation untidily onto each page, it is the very opposite of Kircher’s in appearance and function: Kircher’s is apparently designed to look useful, whereas the other is designed to be used.<sup>35</sup>

Moreover, the implications of the *tableau* as a coordinated display of *words* with

things in *China Illustrata* cannot be overestimated not only because the tableau foregrounds the hieroglyphic nature of Chinese writing as a putatively universal or philosophical reflection of reality (an idea that Kircher suggests while maintaining that Chinese, unlike Egyptian, has lost most of these qualities over time through secularized use) but also because it appears precisely during one of the liveliest periods of discussion and publication about universal language systems.<sup>36</sup> Similar tables had already been proposed by Kircher in his *Polygraphia Nova et Universalis* (1663) for his “new steganography” or translinguistic writing system, consisting of a series of polyglot tables that allowed the numerical cross-indexing of common concepts and phrases across languages. In some sense, Kircher’s “tabling” of the monument is the best restitution that representational technology can afford for the disaster at Babel that made necessary such an effort to recover the gospel from a strange tongue. (Here the Benjaminian trope of an Adamic pure language above all languages is made literal again.)<sup>37</sup>

Thus, to return to the example of the cosmogony, it should now be clear that what the play in Kircher’s ostensibly unwobbling apparatus highlights is precisely the limitation of Benjamin’s model of expressing the truth of a dogmatic text through the *literal* rendering of *syntax*. Boym’s verbatim version thematizes the original Greek sense of *syntax*, not merely as the order of words, but rather as “a combination of parts into a whole,” insofar as the inflections of Latin grammar can redetermine the syntactical combination of the words with relatively little regard for their order.<sup>38</sup> More specifically, by breaking the sentence after *sheng* 生 “produxit” at the column break, Boym can alter the *syntax* from what is typical in Chinese (subject-verb-object) to what is typical in classical Latin (subject-object-verb) while at the same time maintaining precisely the same *word order*. This flexibility of syntax and word order in a highly inflected language like Latin is precisely what makes such a verbatim translation possible. Even though the word-for-word translation reads very awkwardly in Latin, it is all but unreadable in most vernaculars (as my translation of Boym’s version earlier shows). François-Savinien Dalquié’s French translation (1670) of Boym’s verbatim version, for instance, must supply many other unnumbered words to maintain the word order so that, in fact, it reads more like a paraphrase than a verbatim translation; and Dalquié in turn embellishes his translation of Kircher’s paraphrase with even further explication.<sup>39</sup> Ogilby does not even attempt to translate the verbatim version into English. Moreover, as I have already suggested, the gap between the protopidgin of the *verbum e verbo* (“the *Chinesian* Phrase, not so accustomed unto our Ears”) and the more idiomatic *sensus de sensu* versions both authenticates and necessitates the latter by alienating and depreciating what is constructed as the Chinese idiom so much that we are propelled into Kircher’s elaborated paraphrase.<sup>40</sup> In its putative ability accurately to render the idiom of Chinese while also conveying the “Genuine sense” of the text more reliably than Chinese itself, Latin is thus presented as an essential technology in the representation of this sacred Chinese object, just as it would continue to be used

with tacit assumptions about its precision and universality in sinological scholarship up through the nineteenth century.<sup>41</sup>

But there is another sort of tableau in Kircher—a “pure tableau”—which functions without Latin and within the Chinese transcription itself by means of an entirely graphic semiology. This tableau is the most extraordinary of them all. In order to understand it, we must first observe that the transcription actually fails to conform to the ideal of the Cartesian grid despite its convincing appearance of orderliness. Instead of numbering both columns and rows, and then methodically plotting the individual *characters* at the intersecting coordinates, Mattheus the transcriber numbers only the columns and then uses his own judgment in the numbering of discrete *words* or *terms* (sometimes pairing characters into compounds with a single number, grouping multicharacter names and titles under one number, and occasionally dropping grammatical particles from the numbering altogether). This approach makes perfect sense since even classical Chinese is not, after all, a purely monosyllabic or monologographic language, despite the many sinophilic fantasies to the contrary. The result, however, is that even though the columns are sequential, the rows are wildly uneven. This method of numbering the words on the grid instead of numbering the grid itself has the advantage of avoiding the introduction of any of the dozen *blank squares* in the Chinese transcription into either of the two translations. At least as much as the difficulty of deciding how to combine characters into words and terms, these blank spaces are what throw the Cartesian grid into chaotic disarray since one must either number the blanks, and therefore leave *numbered empty spaces* in the verbatim translation, or skip over the spaces and resume numbering with the next character, and therefore dislocate the rows (which is what happens). Moreover, the transcription actually reduces by two-thirds the number of these blank spaces from a total of about three dozen blanks on the actual monument, so that the characters gradually begin to shift into new columns. Indeed, by the end of the transcription, the grid of characters no longer corresponds to the arrangement of characters on the monument at all, but has slipped by about twenty positions! Of course, no reader in Europe without a rubbing of the monument at hand could know that. (Kircher, incidentally, possessed one.)

What is crucial about the erasure of space in the transcription is that these blanks are *inscribed* uninscribed spaces, signifiers of respect known as *que zi* 闕字 (missing characters) traditionally placed before the names of former emperors; on the stele, these spaces are also used for some but not all references to the Christian god.<sup>42</sup> The Jesuits, who clearly understood this convention, routinely use the same honorific spaces in their Chinese writings (as do Matteo Ricci and Giulio Aleni in the treatises cited in this essay). Furthermore, both the Christian god and also all the Tang emperors equally receive the customary *two* honorific spaces. We might attribute this spacing to the authors of the inscription, but it would seem more likely to be the work of Lü Xiuyan 呂秀巖, the titled state secretary who is identified on the monument as its superb calligrapher, and who is *not* identified in any way as a



Christian. There are only three exceptions to the twenty instances, where only one space is used instead of two, twice for emperors (who are not named in that spot) and once for the Christian god. The remarkable feature of Kircher's grid in *China Illustrata* is that it turns the tables on the tablet, so to speak, so that the Christian god systematically receives *two* honorific spaces and the emperors only *one*. Mattheus has even expanded the place where the Christian god receives only one space on the monument to *two* honorific spaces on the transcription while also removing the spaces in nine of the remaining sixteen references to emperors altogether. Thus, without altering a single character, but simply by modifying the disposition of the characters on the grid, the transcription has irrefutably altered the sense of the text, bringing all of those "Sons of Heaven" (天子) down one notch in relation to the "Son of God." The transcription is both faithful and inaccurate at the same time. It translates without seeming to translate at all. Notably, when the Jesuit missionary Manoel Dias Jr. had his Chinese edition of the inscription printed in China (1644) to spread news of the monument among Chinese readers—for whom the relative spacing would have been immediately legible—he prudently removed *all* of these spaces from the printed text.<sup>43</sup>

### **Skiping the Nestorian Stone**

As a great deal of impressively detailed scholarship has shown, the collective work of translating and interpreting the Confucian classics by Ricci and his colleagues was an integral part of the controversial Jesuit project of "accommodation," which sought to integrate Christian practices into traditional Chinese customs and beliefs. One of the chief strategies of this project was to tease out of Confucianism (against Buddhism and Daoism) a primordial monotheism, in order to convince the Chinese that Christianity was not so very different from, and in fact was complementary to, what their greatest ancestors had believed, despite the accretion of "superstitions" through the centuries. The Jesuit missionaries thus became quite experienced in reading classical Chinese texts which were not in the least bit Christian and nudging them closer to Christian meanings while simultaneously arguing that the revered ancient commentaries on those classics were mistaken—in other words, that they understood Chinese texts better than the Chinese did. Imagine the initial excitement at the thought that all of that sinological knowledge could now be directed at a *truly* Christian text; and imagine the surprise when that text proved to be very similar in many ways to the texts that needed nudging, including the well-meaning but unorthodox commentaries by converts like Yang Tingyun who tried to explain their new beliefs in their own terms.<sup>44</sup> In the end, the training that the Jesuits received in accommodationist reading methods would prove useful in this instance, too.

What was at stake for Kircher in editing, translating, and interpreting the mon-

ument with absolute sinological credibility was nothing less than defending both the authority of the Roman Catholic church and the legitimacy of the Jesuit missions abroad. As Kircher surely understood, the stele was valuable to the Jesuits on two fronts. As tangible evidence of the antiquity of Christianity (not least for its impressive chronicle of gospel-friendly Tang emperors), the monument was the ideal prop for converting the people of China who would generally be less likely to revere a teaching that could be considered a novelty.<sup>45</sup> In Europe, properly explicated, the stele could be appropriated as a providential sign in counter-reformation or pro-Jesuit polemics in the face of increasingly controversial and even endangered missions in both India and China during the seventeenth century. Both of these strategies, however, are predicated upon the assumption that it is an “orthodox,” rather than a “Nestorian,” monument, which latter possibility might allow it to be used in Protestant polemics like a secret weapon fallen into the hands of the enemy. (This finally happened in the nineteenth century.)<sup>46</sup> That it might be considered a “Chinese” monument was disregarded to the point of denial, as can be seen in the absolute avoidance of any description whatsoever of the crown of entwined dragons on the stele.<sup>47</sup>

The more serious threat, however, which raised the personal stakes for Kircher, were allegations of fraud, especially those by the Presbyterian scholar Georg Horn, who in 1652 wrote that the stone described in Kircher’s *Prodromus* was patently a Jesuit myth invented to cheat the Chinese of their treasures—news of which calumny made its way back to the Jesuits in China almost immediately.<sup>48</sup> Another published attack came a few years later from the young German scholar Gottlieb Spitzel who judged from Kircher’s translation that the monument seemed to have been produced very recently by some “semi-Christian, semi-Chinese Scholar.”<sup>49</sup> Kircher charitably declines to name these two, but states explicitly that this elaborate new presentation of the monument in *China Illustrata* is meant to answer certain “incompetent Censurers or Aristarchuses, who have ceased not to wound its reputation by snarling and trifling objections,” and whom he also likened to so many “troublesome Flesh-flies” buzzing around a piece of fat.<sup>50</sup> Kircher explains:

Moved therefore by these reasons, lest that a Monument of so great concern deprived of its Credit, should run the hazard of being cast away; I shall labour so by the divine assistance to establish the truth of the Monument in this undertaken work, (being my contexture from the very bottom of the matter) . . . that from henceforth there may no place of doubting be left, and the Heterodox themselves may be forced to confess (the Interpretation of this *Syro-Chinesian* Inscription being considered) that no other Doctrine was taught above a thousand years past by the Preachers of the Gospel, which is not altogether consonant and conformable; yea, the very same with the Orthodox Doctrine now professed, and therefore the Gospel Preached formerly in *China* is the same with that, which the Universal Catholick Roman Church enjoineeth to be believed at this day.<sup>51</sup>

The degree to which *China Illustrata* was written as a response to such objections should be properly stressed in any reading of the book as a proto-ethnographic



collection, especially with respect to Kircher's polemic that the monument is *not* Nestorian, which is carried out so indirectly that it could easily be missed. Indeed, after Horn accuses the Jesuits of inventing the monument, in the very next sentence, he writes: "Be that as it may, it is established that the Nestorians had been very strong in China and Cataya for many centuries, and that they converted the Emperors of these peoples to the Christian faith."<sup>52</sup> Horn then identifies them as the source of stories about Prester John, and goes on to observe that the Chinese and Catayan Christians at that time gradually fell into "profanas superstitiones."<sup>53</sup> In other words, the challenge to which Kircher had to respond was not simply that the tablet was not authentic, but more important, by implication, that its providential sign was not intended for the Jesuits.

In fact, the Jesuits of the seventeenth century had every reason to suspect that the monument was Nestorian, if only because Marco Polo reports finding Nestorians several times in the course of his travels. Samuel Purchas, in his chapter on Nestorians, confirms that "in Marcus Paulus his historie of the East Regions, and in others, wee finde mention of them, and of no sect of Christians but them, in very many parts and Provinces of Tartarie."<sup>54</sup> Even the Latin edition of Polo prepared by the Jesuit Andreas Müller in 1671 contains the same dozen references to Nestorians, including a Nestorian church in the great city of "Quinsay" (Hangzhou) and, most notably, two Nestorian churches in "Cingianfu" (Xi'anfu) where the stele was discovered.<sup>55</sup> Indeed, Nicholas Trigault's edition of Ricci's writings also clearly stated that there had been many Nestorian Christians in China during the time of Marco Polo, which was an unproblematic claim at the time of its publication in 1615 not only because they had apparently all disappeared, but also since the monument had not yet been discovered.<sup>56</sup>

Yet Kircher only once even raises the question of Nestorianism, asserting (on the basis of no evidence whatsoever) that the missionaries who erected the monument were not those infected with the Nestorian heresy, but rather were orthodox Christians descended from St. Thomas the Apostle, who set out for China before the corruption of the church. In the long letter quoted by Kircher, Boym's rhetoric about the monument is precisely the same ("that from this most ancient testimony every one may conjecture, how true the Doctrine of the Catholicks is"), which means that his claim about the Nestorians must also be: "and I doubt not at all but that there were Christians in the Kingdoms of *China*, when that the *Tartars* about 300 Years past first invaded *China*, and that they lived there mixed with *Sarazens*, *Jews*, *Nestorians*, and *Gentiles*."<sup>57</sup> Kircher's strategy of addressing the Nestorian question is twofold: he insists repeatedly on the orthodox doctrine of the inscription (which is really what is at stake anyway) while also attempting to associate the stele with St. Thomas, which has the double advantage of directing attention *away* from the Nestorian character of the stele while extending its supposed providential character to include the large Jesuit mission in India in addition to that in China.<sup>58</sup> In the most stunning piece of graphic rhetoric in *China Illustrata*, whereby the *tableaux*

speak for themselves, Kircher demonstrates that the monument is Thomasian (and not Nestorian) by supplying a full-page engraving of the so-called “Miraculous Cross of St. Thomas the Apostle” at Mylapur, while also altering the cross on the transcription to resemble it (figs. 7, 8, 9). One cannot fault Kircher himself, perhaps, for ignoring the elaborately entwined dragons on the stele since they could not be represented on the flat rubbing that was brought to him in Rome (even if those “profane” dragons are the most salient physical feature of the stele). But it is difficult to see anything but a graphic polemic at work in the publication of a cross that looks nothing like the one on the stele rubbing in Kircher’s museum.<sup>59</sup> Moreover, what does show very clearly on any rubbing is that the cross is not only flanked by two lilylike flowers (traditional Christian emblems of purity and sanctity) but also most immediately framed by two *ru yi* 如意 cloud patterns (traditional Chinese symbols for good luck or wish fulfillment). Most strikingly, the cross sits upon a lotus blossom, like the Buddha himself. (Insofar as the lotus is also a symbol of purity and sanctity, the cross is thus surrounded by a combination of comparable Chinese, Buddhist, and Christian motifs.) Of course, Kircher’s “illustration” of the cross on the transcription does not include these elements, and his detailed description of it makes no mention of them whatsoever.

As is provocatively hinted by this multiple framing of the cross, what makes the so-called Nestorian monument itself so fascinating is that it is not, strictly speaking, a Nestorian monument at all, but rather a Daoist-Confucian-Buddhist-Nestorian monument whose hybridity resists the sort of appropriative reading that the Jesuits brought to it. Here we might observe that the author is identified on the monument as *Jingjing* 景淨, or “Adam” in the Syriac. He is called a *seng* 僧 (a monk or priest, originally a Buddhist term) and was surely at least a Christian, but he also seems to have been something of a freelancer since he has been identified as the collaborator with a Buddhist monk in the translation of at least one sutra.<sup>60</sup> The inscription is composed in the *pian ti* 駢體 (paired style), a series of allusive parallel couplets of varying lengths, the ideal of which was to create an artful and authoritative pastiche of allusions to classical texts.<sup>61</sup> The style enjoyed great popularity during the Tang dynasty, especially in the composition of Buddhist texts that cited Confucian classics for authority and often drew on Daoist texts for crucial mystical terms. To a reader attentive to such intertextuality, the Daoist and Buddhist diction of the inscription is particularly striking. Moreover, it has been persuasively argued in this century that the inscription is actually modeled on that of the *Toutuo si bei* 頭陀寺碑 (Dhūta temple stele), a late-fifth-century Buddhist inscription, also in the paired style, which was widely circulated in the sixth-century *Wenxuan* 文選 (Literature anthology) and much celebrated for its literary style.<sup>62</sup> In short, the inscription left by this Adam 景淨 is a densely polysemous, synthetic composition that resists literal translation. The very impossibility of rendering the culturally specific connotations of this text into a language that has separate lines of relation to those intersecting discourses reminds us that “equivalents” must always be either thickly layered or

FIGURE 7. Detail of the cross on  
the transcription in figure 3.  
Collection of the author.



FIGURE 8. Detail of a  
rubbing showing the actual  
cross on the monument.  
Collection of the author.



FIGURE 9. The “Miraculous Cross of St. Thomas the Apostle” in Kircher’s *China Illustrata*, 54 f. Collection of the author.

sought in radically relative terms lest we fall into the pre-Saussurean fallacy of absolute referentiality (which is where we find Kircher).

The best example for illustrating how this sort of overdetermination complicates any translation is the most hotly debated crux of the inscription: whether or not the term *fen-shen* 分身 (literally “divide” and “body”) explicitly refers to the specific point of doctrine that came to define the Nestorians after the Chalcedon Council in the fifth century. Over what may have been largely the result of political rivalries and a confusion of terms, Nestorius, the Patriarch of Constantinople, was accused of preaching that the divine and the human in the incarnation were not merely two different natures, but actually two different *persons*, as though the second person of the trinity had simply entered a human body rather than having actually *become* human.<sup>63</sup> The doctrinal debate is not important here. What matters to us is that the use of the term *fen-shen* 分身 for Jesus has appeared to many commentators to be suspiciously emphatic in its suggestion of a “divided body,” as though it were meant to inscribe precisely what distinguished the Nestorian creed as heretical by the orthodox church, thereby branding the monument also as unorthodox. As early as the eighteenth century, when the first commentations after Kircher appeared, every scholar of the monument has wrangled over the term as a crux. (Indeed, the tablet is just as much of a fetish for sinologists who insist on the positive identification of it as Nestorian as it is for devotional writers who want to appropriate the monument for sectarian purposes.) The famous sinologist and Protestant missionary James Legge, for example, optimistically claims in a published lecture, “The great crux of the Nestorian doctrine was avoided, and very wisely avoided by those who composed the Inscription”; but then he writes in the notes to his bilingual version of the text, “The peculiar dogma of Nestorius underlies the expression [分身],—the dogma of ‘two persons in Christ’; one of the many vain attempts to fathom ‘the great mystery of godliness.’”<sup>64</sup> (One is tempted to see the divided person of missionary and sinologist in Legge’s comment.) To complicate matters further, what would not be understood among European scholars until the late nineteenth century is that *fen-shen* 分身 is also a Buddhist term for the simultaneous, multiple manifestations of a *bodhisattva*, used particularly for both Shakyamuni and Maitreya.<sup>65</sup>

What is important for us here is that, whether or not there might be a suggestion of Nestorian dogma in the term, the Jesuits avoided any hint of it in their translations. For the first occurrence, 我三一分身 (our three-in-one *fen-shen*), Boym gives “<sup>17</sup>personarum <sup>18</sup>trium <sup>19</sup>una <sup>20</sup>communicavit <sup>16</sup>seipsam” (<sup>17</sup>of the persons <sup>18</sup>triple <sup>19</sup>one <sup>20</sup>he communicated <sup>16</sup>himself); and for the second occurrence, 分身出代 (the *fen-shen* appeared among humankind), Boym gives “<sup>37</sup>communicando <sup>38</sup>seipsum, <sup>39</sup>prodit in <sup>40</sup>mundum . . .” (<sup>37</sup>communicating <sup>38</sup>himself, he <sup>39</sup>brought forth in the <sup>40</sup>world . . .).<sup>66</sup> As we saw earlier, the declensions allow Boym to change the syntax without altering the word-order. The paraphrase, however, simply dispenses with the theologically troubling expression altogether in both cases. For the first occur-

rence, 我三一分身 (our three-in-one *fenshen*), Kircher gives “una de Divinis personis sanctissimae Trinitatis” (one of the divine Persons of the most Holy Trinity); and for the second, 分身出代 (the *fenshen* appeared among men), Kircher offers a compensatory flourish as “Una ex personis pro aeterna mortalium salute factus est homo” (One of the Persons for the eternal Salvation of Mankind was made Man).<sup>67</sup> All four of these translations suggest that the division implied in *fenshen* 分身 is the division inherent in the holy trinity rather than a division within Jesus himself, either in nature, in person, or in multilocationality.

Considering the context in which the inscription was written, *fenshen* 分身 may well be the perfect word (the *mot juste*, the 正名) brilliantly fabricated in the “workshop of equivalences” precisely because it ambiguously indicates a miraculous bodhisattva-like multilocal manifestation, *and* a godhead divided into three, *and* an incarnation of divine and human natures, *and* even one in which the divine and human beings are separate persons—all at the same time for different audiences without actually *meaning* any one of them to the exclusion of the others. The cultural and linguistic hybridity of this term resists any attempt at translation but the most discursive and paraphrastic renderings, which are, of course, no less subject to arbitrary choices. When, for example, the idea of the divine act of creation *ex nihilo* is couched in the language of an ancient mechanistic cosmogony, how one chooses to translate it depends on precisely what one is trying to illustrate. Likewise, when the idea of the “Messiah” is expressed with such a polysemous Buddhist-Nestorian-Catholic term, the temptation to translate it into what the text *ought* to say, over what the text actually says, might be very great from a devotional or doctrinal standpoint—as it certainly was for the Jesuits—since the “faithful” translator may appeal for justification to the ultimate transcendental signified, quite literally in this case, the divine *Logos* itself.<sup>68</sup>

### Rescripting the Rescript, Or How Jesuit Sages Translate

As I have already mentioned, what was considered by the Jesuits to be the most important passage of the inscription is the rescript of an imperial proclamation issued by Emperor Tai Zong 太宗 (627–49 c.e.) in 638 that both praises Christianity as a doctrine and also grants permission for its teachings to be spread throughout the kingdom. Ever since the Jesuits had been in China, nothing like it had been known to exist; and although it would be some while before the rescript could be independently verified, the Jesuits immediately stuck their foot in the door that it opened. When Dias first made his announcement of the discovery in a published letter from China written in 1625, the rescript was the *only* passage from the monument that he quoted (in Italian), with the comment that this was as far as the Jesuits had been able to translate the monument.<sup>69</sup> For me, what is important about this passage is that it is very clearly the most crucial point of identification that



the Jesuits had to make with the monument: when the emperor speaks of the followers of the Luminous Religion, they must be understood to mean the orthodox prototype of the Jesuit missionaries to follow (and not only that, but also the right sort of Jesuit missionary, as we will see). In short, I will argue that in translating the rescript the Jesuits interpolated themselves into the emperor's interpellation of Tang dynasty Nestorian Christians.

The imperial rescript begins thus:

道無常名聖無常體，隨方設教密濟群生。

[The Way has no constant name; the Sage has no constant mode. In accordance with the place, they establish teachings, which mysteriously save the people.]<sup>70</sup>

The passage is difficult to translate succinctly, but the general sense of the opening lines is clearly an expression of religio-philosophic tolerance, which serves as prelude to the proclamation on Christianity (which is specified only in the *following* lines with the mention of the missionary Aluoben 阿羅本).<sup>71</sup> But, as many readers will no doubt have observed already, the phrase that opens the imperial rescript—道無常名 (*dao* has no everlasting name)—alludes unmistakably to the famous opening lines of the *Daode jing*: 道可道非常道，名可名非常名 (There is a way to speak the Way, but not the Everlasting Way. There is a name that can be named, but not the Everlasting Name). Thus, with an allusion that must have been as recognizable to the Jesuits working in China as it is to any reader of Chinese today, the emperor seems to be suggesting, in his tolerance, that all such teachings as Christianity are merely modalities of the everlasting *Dao* 道. The first word of the rescript has also been translated as “Systems” (Legge) and “Right principles” (Alexander Wylie) since *dao* 道 can also be used more generally in the sense of a *teaching* or a *proper way of doing something*, but that choice effaces the Daoist specificity of the term, which is very strikingly reinforced by the rest of the phrase.<sup>72</sup> Both of the Latin versions in *China Illustrata* take this strategy a step further by rendering this *dao* 道 as “*Lex*” (in the verbatim version) and “*Lex vera*” (in the paraphrase), not only effacing all Daoist associations from the word, but also rendering it specifically, if implicitly, as the Christian doctrine. In sum, whereas Emperor Tai Zong commences his decree with an allusion to a Daoist classic as part of his self-fashioning as an erudite and tolerant ruler, the Jesuits strip away the cultural, religious, and linguistic specificity of the term to figure him as proclaiming the truth of Christianity from the moment he opens his imperial mouth.<sup>73</sup>

One could imagine from looking at only this much of the text that Adam 景淨 might have felt similar reservations about the emperor's phrasing when composing the inscription, and yet could do nothing but quote the rescript as he received it. But in fact, he has very cleverly set up the rescript by troping on the language of the *Daode jing* immediately before the quotation in order to recuperate the emperor's potentially Daoist language as more specifically Christian. In the brief introduc-



tion to Tai Zong, he writes: “The true and everlasting *dao* is mysterious and difficult to name; but in order for its merits and practice to be illuminated, we strain and call it the ‘luminous religion’” (眞常之道, 妙而難名, 功用照彰, 強稱景教). We must recall that Laozi famously strained for something to call the *Dao* in chapter twenty-five of the *Daode jing* and came up with “Great.” Adam 景淨 seems to be trying to reverse the Daoist subsumption of the Nestorian teaching: Illuminating the Luminous Religion may reveal it to be but a variety of the great *Dao*; but it may also reveal that what we talk about when we talk about the true and everlasting *Dao* is, in fact, *jingjiao* 景教 (Nestorian Christianity).<sup>74</sup> This introduction continues with another nod to Laozi: “But *dao* without the Sage does not flourish; and the Sage without *dao* is not great. When *dao* and the Sage fit together like a tally, all the world becomes civilized and enlightened” (惟道非聖不弘, 聖非道不大, 道聖符契, 天下文明). But this is an introduction for an emperor, not a missionary or a hermit; and, indeed, the character *sheng* 聖, which I have been translating as “Sage,” is often used to refer to the emperor, as is certainly the case here.<sup>75</sup> In other words, all doctrines, including Christianity, need the aid of emperors in order to thrive, just as emperors need some kind of *dao* to succeed. Adam 景淨 tropes on this diction even further in the midst of his catalog of Tang rulers: “There is nothing that is not possible for the *dao*, and whatever is possible can be named; there is nothing that cannot be done by a Sage/Emperor, and whatever can be done can be narrated” (道無不可, 所可名, 聖無不作, 所作客述). Although the Jesuits themselves also made much use of the pun on *dao* 道 as “The Way” for expressing the idea of the gospel, the pun cannot be said to work the same way in Ricci’s *Tianzhu shiyi*, for example, as it does on the monument—either when the Emperor is proclaiming in quotation or Adam 景淨 is writing on his own—except insofar as they all clear bench-space in the workshop of equivalences for the translanguistic, transcultural production of meanings.<sup>76</sup> The question for us is what “equivalences” Kircher’s edition forges, and how.

Recall that in Kircher’s explanation of how to use the fourfold apparatus, the imagined “lector curiosus” would begin by reading the Latin paraphrase:

*Lex vera non habet nomen determinatum, nec sancti locum habent, ubi consistent, determinatum: excurrunt ad omnes partes, ut Mundum doceant, ad Mundo laboranti succurrendum, velis, remis, ad utilitatem afferendam intenti.*

[The true Law hath no determinate name, nor have the Saints any limited place where they remain; they run to all Parts that they may instruct the World, being intent with might and main to do good and succour the afflicted people.]<sup>77</sup>

Far from a general sense of the value of religious systems in different lands, the overwhelming impression that these opening lines make is that the Chinese emperor, with an ideal clarity of inspiration, seems to have understood the “true Law” of Christianity and the nature of missionary work some one thousand years ago.

Such a curious reader might then turn back one *tabula*, to the verbatim translation, where the passage surprisingly appears in a patch of single-spaced text amidst the double-spaced text required of the word-for-word superscripting:

*Lex non habet ordinarium nomen, sancti non habent semper eundem locum, decurrunt Mundum proponendo Legem, creberrimè succurrentes multitudini populorum. . . .*

[The Law has no ordinary name; the holy ones do not always have the same place; they run through the World propagating the Law, frequently succoring the multitudes of people. . . .]<sup>78</sup>

The sense here is more or less the same as the paraphrase, but the very point of having a numbering system to cross-reference the characters has been defeated. Notably, of the two sizable quotations of other Chinese sources on the monument—the imperial rescript and a description of *Dagin* taken from an ancient chronicle (which most Christian sinologists have found disquietingly fantastic)—both are printed *without* superscripted numbers as though it were unnecessary to provide the complete *verbum e verbo* apparatus for “profane” text, that is, for the parts of the inscription that were not originally written by an early Christian. Nevertheless, aside from noting that this version conforms awkwardly to the “Chinesian phrase,” a seventeenth-century reader could make the following observations: (1) according to Boym, the Chinese text does not actually say “*true* Law,” but rather simply “Lex” (but both are singular, so it must mean Christianity); (2) the two versions disagree about whether the emperor finds the name of that law “*ordinarium*” or “*determinatum*” (but that is a small matter); (3) where Boym gives “they do not have a determined place,” Kircher adds the emphasis “where they stay” (*ubi consistent*); and (4) whereas Boym gives simply four words, “frequently succoring [the] multitudes [of] people” (*creberrimè succurrentes multitudini populorum*), Kircher embellishes the work of these “saints” as “laboring to give succor to the world, with all their power [with sails, with oars], intent upon aiding the afflicted” (*ad Mundo laboranti succurrendum, velis, remis, ad utilitatem afferendam intenti*).

As for the critical apparatus, the breakdown in the superscripted numbering here would make it impossible for someone who does not already know Chinese to go any further. Even if one were exceptionally industrious, one’s efforts would be thwarted in two ways. First, the characters in the transcription are misnumbered at the start of the column, just when the rescript begins: 秋<sup>1</sup> 七<sup>2</sup> 月<sup>3</sup> 設<sup>4</sup> 曰<sup>5</sup> 道<sup>6</sup> 無<sup>7</sup> 長<sup>8</sup> 名<sup>9</sup>. (Such a Cartesian grid belongs only in Borges.)<sup>79</sup> Second, the numbering of the verbatim version does not even correspond to the confused numbers of the transcription before it breaks off altogether. For the three characters: “設<sup>4</sup> 曰<sup>5</sup> 道<sup>6</sup>” (<sup>4</sup>proclaimed, <sup>4</sup>saying: <sup>5</sup>*dao* . . .), Boym gives: “<sup>4</sup>edictum Regis positum <sup>5</sup>inquit Lex . . .” (the <sup>4</sup>edict of the King issued <sup>5</sup>said The Law . . .). In other words, *edict* in Latin is paired with *proclaimed* in Chinese; and *saying* in Latin is paired with *dao* 道—which is, in fact, one of the possible meanings of that word, but not here: *dao* 道 is the first word of the imperial rescript (as we have just seen), introduced by the

preceding word *yue* 曰 (*saying*) which is customarily used to open a quotation. So much for Kircher's tables.

What a seventeenth-century reader of Kircher's edition who does not know Chinese could never see is that the opening lines of the imperial rescript have been transformed from a declaration of protorelativistic tolerance expressed in distinctly Daoist terms into a celebration of model missionaries carrying Christianity overseas. In Kircher's paraphrase, *sages* (*sheng* 聖) no longer change their *mode* (*ti* 體), but rather the *holy ones* (*sancti*) change their *place* (*locus*). (I will return to this change of *ti* 體 / mode.) Similarly, for that final phrase *mi ji qun sheng* 密濟群生 (mysteriously save the living), although the translations are roughly accurate, nevertheless the frame of reference and the subject have shifted significantly so that the *doctrines* established in each place no longer "mysteriously save the living" of *that* place, but rather these *holy ones* "mysteriously save the living" of *other* places and every place. For *mi* 密 (mysteriously), whereas Boym describes these holy ones as giving succor "*creberrime*," or "frequently," Kircher describes them as giving succor "*velis, remis*"—literally, "by means of sails and oars," a Latin idiom for "going all out" (Ogilby renders it as "with might and main"). Kircher's elaboration metonymically underscores the sense of sea travel that both the paraphrase and Boym's version contribute to the passage. (We should recall that the long and gruelling sea voyage from Lisbon to Goa on the way to China was a memorably unpleasant trial for most Jesuits, who often remark upon it in their letters.) Dalquie's French translation of Kircher further emphasizes precisely this sense, as if intentionally elaborating on the elaboration in the paraphrase by construing it *both* figuratively *and* literally: "Their occupation is to follow all parts of the world in order to instruct souls and succor the miserable and the afflicted: and it is for this reason that they employ sails and oars happily to realize their aims and in order effectively to serve the people."<sup>80</sup> In the same vein, the paraphrase first introduces Aluoben 阿羅本 as a sort of seafarer in the lines immediately preceding the rescript: instead of "divining from the azure clouds and carrying the true scriptures, auguring from the wind in order to journey through difficulties and dangers" (占青雲而載真經, 望風律以馳難險), the paraphrase states that Aluoben 阿羅本 "brought as it were from the Clouds this true Doctrine: Driven by the winds, & by the help of Hydrographical Maps [*chartas hydrographicis*], he sustained many dangers and much labour."<sup>81</sup> By adding these "Hydrographical Maps" where there is nothing in the Chinese (unless *zhen jing* 真經 "true scriptures" is translated twice), Kircher's version restyles Aluoben 阿羅本 as a seachart-toting missionary-sailor from afar.

As I have just observed, the reading that launches those Sages out into the world like missionaries pivots entirely on the translation of the single word *ti* 體 (*mode, substance, essence, form, body, style*) as "*locus*," from which shift everything else in the passage follows.<sup>82</sup> In fact, the translation of the emperor's use of *ti* 體 as "*locus*" is so odd, so counterintuitive, so apparently *wrong* that one wonders whether there is some motivation for it other than the purely lexicographic. Indeed, one sees the

stakes of this transformation in the very first Latin translation of the monument dated 1625 (an anonymous manuscript that was never published in the seventeenth century, but which undoubtedly circulated among the Jesuits):

*Lex nomen proprium non habet, sanctus non habet perpetuas regulas, locis se accommodat in propenda doctrina ut expresse possit omnibus mentibus auxiliari.*

[The Law has no proper name, nor does the holy one have constant rules; he accommodates himself to places in propagating the doctrine that it may be able to render aid to the minds of all people.]<sup>83</sup>

In this version the protorelativism of the emperor's statement becomes an explicit endorsement of the controversial Jesuit program of accommodation, the strategy of adapting Christian teachings and practices to be better integrated with local cultures. Here, *ti* 體 (mode, substance, form) is translated as “*regulas*” (rules) and *sui fang* 隨方 (according to the place) is rendered as “he accommodates himself to places” (*locis se accommodat*) thereby allowing the “*sanctus*” to change his rules at the same time that he changes *places*. The translation is ingenious for suggesting a traveling Sage by implying that a particular Sage adapts to a plurality of places, rather than that Sages in general or their teachings differ according to their own localities. If Paul Pelliot is correct that this first translation was the work of Trigault, the most passionate defender of the accommodationist policies that were increasingly coming under attack even from some within the Jesuit order itself, it may be that subsequent translations cautiously shied away from Trigault's explicitly accommodationist language in rendering a statement that is, after all, not so very far from the accommodationist ideal in its suggestion of a variability in the mode of sacred wisdom according to location.<sup>84</sup> In other words, the emperor's statement comes close enough to the idea of accommodation that it may have seemed difficult *not* to suggest it without radically altering the translation of *ti* 體 (mode, substance, form) to something completely different, such as *locus*. One wonders whether the translation that came to constitute the received version of the rescript through Kircher—who was *not* sympathetic to the accommodationist program—was, in fact, an attempt to keep the monument *out* of the current controversies within the order. To be sure, the notion of “inconstancy” in the emperor's phrase *wu chang ti* 無常體 (without constant *ti*) does not sound much like a Christian virtue (nor was it intended to be); so it comes as less of a surprise perhaps that Kircher's version stresses the very opposite of Trigault's earlier, unpublished reading, as if to insist: Whatever the Chinese says, the only thing that changes about “us” is our *locus*.

And yet we should also note that even if the translation of *ti* 體 (mode, substance, form) as *locus* is suspiciously strained, there is a certain Christian logic to it that makes it as ingenious as Trigault's. In fact, *ti* 體 poses some of the same difficulties as *dao* 道. It is a highly overdetermined word with a complicated history in philosophical writings stretching back at least to Wang Bi's 王弼 third-century

commentaries on the *Daode jing* where he uses it as something like a *material essence* as opposed to *outward form* or *function* in the famous *ti-yong* (體/用) dyad, which is as crucial to Chinese philosophy as the matter/form dyad in European metaphysics. Let us also recall that it is the very term in the aphorism quoted earlier that “all things are of one *substance*” (*wan wu yi ti* 萬物一體); and Ricci, for example, uses it repeatedly in this sense in his arguments against the unified substance of Neo-Confucian cosmology in his *Tianzhu shiyi*. In short, the Jesuits could not have been at a loss for translating it. But they also adopted the term to express some of the more mysterious qualities of Christian doctrine, as in such phrases as *san wei yi ti* 三位一體 (three persons in one *ti*) for the trinity, and *tong ti* 同體 (combined *ti*) for the unified substance of the trinity in Jesus.<sup>85</sup> Moreover, as we see in Aleni’s *Mi sa ji yilue* 彌撒祭義略 (A brief explanation of the Sacrifice of the Mass), the Jesuits also used it for the Eucharist in the term *sheng ti* 聖體 (sacred substance/body), combining the very *sheng* 聖 (sage) and *ti* 體 (substance) that appear in that line of the emperor’s rescript (聖無常體, the sage has no constant substance).<sup>86</sup> Insofar as the theory of transubstantiation—that is, *hua ti* 化體 (“transform”/“substance”)—describes the sudden substantial appearance of Jesus (as *sheng* 聖, Sage) where it had not existed before, one could in fact construe *ti* 體 (mode, substance, form) as carrying at least the connotation of place. But such a reading of the *sheng* 聖 (Sage) as “Christ” in the imperial rescript is not then borne out by the rest of the translation, as we have seen. The *telos* of this term in Kircher’s translations, as I have suggested, would seem to be the Jesuit missionaries themselves—two of whom, let us recall, were formally translated to *sheng* 聖 in 1622, as the Saints Loyola and Xavier, thereby changing, in some sense, both their mode and their place.<sup>87</sup>

Finally, although the Jesuits certainly did not know it, they may not have been the first to re-script the rescript. A close comparison of the inscription with the rescript as it has been preserved in the *Tang hui yao* 唐會要 (a tenth-century compendium of Tang dynasty texts) suggests that the clever Adam 景淨 made a few subtle changes of his own when he committed the imperial text to the monument, adding or changing nearly two dozen characters in the rescript.<sup>88</sup> In addition to a number of minor changes that I will not discuss, Adam 景淨 apparently puts three new phrases into the emperor’s mouth. The first stresses that the emperor has 觀其元宗 (beheld their principal teachings), which Kircher translates into a reinscription of Christian cosmology, as the emperor finds that the doctrine is “fundatam principaliter in Creatione Mundi” (founded principally in the Creation of the World).<sup>89</sup> But Adam 景淨 also apparently extends the emperor’s praise of Christianity with his own decidedly Daoist couplet: “The language contains no troublesome speech; the principles remain when the fishnet is forgotten” (詞無繁說, 理有忘筌).<sup>90</sup> Many readers will already know that the famous passage to which this alludes in Zhuangzi is not really about fishing at all, but about language: “The aim of the net is the fish: when you get the fish, you forget the net. The aim of the snare is the rabbit: when you get the rabbit, you forget the snare. The aim of language is the idea: when you



get the idea, you forget the language” (荃者所以在魚，得魚而忘荃；蹄者所以在兔，得兔而忘蹄；言者所以在意，得意而忘言).<sup>91</sup> In appropriating this phrase from Zhuangzi and further emphasizing the Daoist styling of the emperor, Adam 景淨 would seem to be hinting at the very provisionality of the compromised terms at play here in a way that describes just what the Jesuit translations would later do: when you get the emperor’s message, you can forget the Daoist web of language in which it is caught, just as you may forget the Chinese terms of the inscription once you recover its carp of truth.

Or *is* he doing this? This last reading assumes that the compendium against which we have compared the inscription is the more accurate text. And yet if, as Antonino Forte has argued, these three phrases were originally included in the rescript and omitted from the *Tang hui yao* by scribal error, but accurately *preserved* on the stele, then how can we read them but as Tai Zong’s praise of Christianity for meeting Zhuangzi’s standards of a good Daoist teaching? Would we not gloss or translate these passages differently depending on who had written them? It is elegantly apt that the allusion here to Zhuangzi’s logocentric parable is itself so enmeshed in the trope of catching fish that it is very difficult to translate it (except a bit awkwardly) without losing the trope itself. As if the Daoist lesson were well learned, Kircher’s edition does just that: “Their Doctrine consists not in a multitude of words, nor doth it superficially lay the base of its truth” (*Doctrina ejus non est multorum verborum, nec superficietens suam fundat veritatem*).<sup>92</sup> And yet Kircher’s appropriation of the “Nestorian” monument for the Jesuit illustration of China *does* consist in a multitude of words—set out in tables like a banquet of explication—demonstrating just how slippery the fish can be when the net of the text is forgotten.

## Notes

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1. Athanasius Kircher, *China Monumentis, qua Sacris qua Profanis, Nec non variis Naturae & Artis Spectaculis, Aliarumque rerum memorabilium Argumentis Illustrata* (Amsterdam, 1667); hereafter *China Illustrata*. All translations are my own unless otherwise attributed. Although emendation for accuracy is sometimes necessary, I prefer to use John Ogilby’s translated selections of Kircher’s text whenever possible to give the quotations a period flavor. They appear in a separately paginated appendix to the translation of Johannes Nieuhof et al., *An Embassy from the East-India Company of the United Provinces, to the Grand Tartar Cham, Emperour of China . . . With Several Remarks Taken out of Father Athanasivs Kircher; Englished and set forth with their several sculptures, by John Ogilby* (London, 1669); hereafter *Several Remarks*.

Most citations include both the English and the Latin. Thus, Ogilby (emended), *Several Remarks*, 2; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 2. A complete French translation appeared almost immediately, by François-Savinien Dalquié, *La Chine D'athanase Kirchere de la Compagnie de Jesus: Illustrée De Plusieurs Monuments Tant Sacrés Que Profanes Et De Quantité De Recherchés De La Nature & De L'art* (Geneva, 1670); hereafter *La Chine illustrée*. See the facsimile, *La Chine D'athanase Kirchere* (Geneva, 1980). Unfortunately, the only facsimile of the Latin edition, *China Illustrata* (Kathmandu, 1979), although widely available, was not made from the original edition printed by Johan Jansson, but rather from the pirated edition printed by Jacob van Meurs (Amsterdam, 1667), whose inverted copper engravings are significantly inferior in quality. The only complete English translation is also made from this pirated edition: *China Illustrata*, trans. Charles D. Van Tuyl (Bloomington, Ind., 1987).

2. 莊子, 雜篇, 外物第二十六. For a complete English translation of the *Book of Zhuangzi*, see Burton Watson, *Chuang Tzu: Basic Writings* (New York, 1964).
3. We informally attribute the neologism “sinography” to David Porter, even though several people were actively involved in defining it as a mode of criticism during a conference at Stanford University in the spring of 2000—including myself, Christopher Bush, Roger Hart, Eric Hayot, Xie Ming, David Porter, Haun Saussy, and Steven Yao. Simply put, “sinography” is to sinology in part what historiography is to history, a variety of critical approaches (informed partly by the discipline itself) theoretically concerned with the conditions under which the discourses of the discipline are traditionally fashioned. Sinography is writing about writing about China, and writing about the writing of China. Saussy’s essays (to which I often draw lateral connections) may be considered exemplary of this sort of criticism. Troping on the discursive myth of the Great Wall—which is, as Arthur Waldron has shown, *many* walls built in many places over many centuries with many gaps along its sprawling form—Saussy characterizes this new sinographic work as attentive to what he calls “great walls of discourse”: that inevitable mediation of discourses affecting all “East/West” cultural encounters, whose forces move back and forth like transference and counter-transference in the scene of analysis, creating objects of understanding on both sides as imaginary as the famous long wall itself. See Saussy, *Great Walls of Discourse and Other Adventures in Cultural China* (Cambridge, Mass., 2001); and Arthur Waldron, *The Great Wall of China: From History to Myth* (Cambridge, 1992). As I see it, sinographies must also designate (less strictly perhaps) the entire continuum of writings and representations that are contingent upon China but have motives that have little or nothing to do with China, from the learned fancies of Kircher to the commercial products of the media industry. And if we sometimes ennoble our various contributions to this project of “writing about the writing about China” by referring to our collective work as the *new* sinographies, we do not intend to deny that essays such as this one are all part of the same discursive continuum as that which constitutes the objects of our critiques. In addition to those named earlier, other authors who have made significant contributions to sinographic criticism (whether they realize it or not) include Rey Chow, Arif Dirlik, Lionel Jensen, Lydia Liu, and Lisa Lowe.
4. The mind-bogglingly vast and varied body of scholarship on the monument is schematically reviewed in the two most comprehensive studies, both of which concentrate on the history of the reception of the stele as well as on historical and philological questions: Paul Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne de Si-ngan-fou* (a posthumous publication of an incomplete manuscript), ed. Antonino Forte (Kyoto, 1996), esp. 59–94; and Henri Havret, *La stèle chrétienne de Si-ngan-fou* (which contains a good deal of devotional rhetoric), 3 vols. (Shanghai, 1895–1902), esp. 2:244–91. See also the earlier edition: Paul



Pelliot, *Recherches sur les chrétiens d'Asie centrale et d'Extrême-Orient: La stèle de Si-Ngan-Fou*, ed. Jean Dauvillier (Paris, 1984). Excellent short introductions in English may be found in the indispensable *Handbook of Christianity in China: Volume One: 635–1800*, ed. Nicholas Standaert (Leiden, 2001), 1–42, esp. 3, 12–15; Forte in Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne*, vii–xii; David Mungello, *Curious Land: Jesuit Accommodation and the Origins of Sinology* (Honolulu, 1989), 164–72; the second chapter of Arthur C. Moule, *Christians in China Before 1550* (London, 1930), 27–51; and the lecture in James Legge, *The Nestorian Monument of Hsi-an Fu . . . and a Lecture on the Monument with a Sketch of Subsequent Christian Missions in China and their Present State* (1888) (New York, 1966). The most thorough studies in English are Alexander Wylie, “The Nestorian Tablet of Se-gan Foo,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* (1856): 277–366; and Yoshiro Sasaki, *The Nestorian Documents and Relics in China*, 2d ed. (Tokyo, 1951), pp. 11–112. The monument also figures prominently in the many histories of Christianity in Asia, including a long chapter in Evariste Régis Huc, *Le christianisme en Chine, en Tartarie, et au Tibet*, 4 vols. (Paris, 1857), 2:3–93; and also a full chapter in Samuel H. Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia* (Maryknoll, N.Y., 1998), 288–323. For annotated bibliographies of the many Chinese commentaries on the stele, see Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne*, 74–94; Havret, *La stèle chrétienne*, 2:314–24 and 2:376–413; and Wylie, “The Nestorian Tablet,” 289–300. For studies in Chinese, see Wang Chang 王昶 (who had already collected many of these commentaries with the inscription in his famous compendium), *Jin shi cui bian* 金石萃編 (Selected bronze and stone inscriptions) (Qingpu, 1805), 102:1–14; Pan Shen 潘紳 (whose commentaries were used by Wylie and Pelliot), *Jingjiao bei wen zhu shi* 景教碑文註釋 (Commentary on the inscription of the Nestorian Stele) (Shanghai, 1925); and Feng Chengjun 馮承鈞 (who provides a good overview), *Jingjiao bei kao* 景教碑考 (A study of the Nestorian stele; 1962) (Taipei, 1962). The text of the inscription appears in vol. 54 of the *Taishō Tripitika*; *Taishō shinshū Daizōkyō* 大正新修大藏經, eds. Junjirō Takakusu and Kaikyoku Wanatabe (Tokyo, 1932), (54) 2144:1289a–1290b. All quotations of the inscription are taken from a rubbing in the author's collection and cited by column number (hereafter 景教碑), beginning with first full column (as in Kircher).

For backgrounds on the Jesuits in China, especially with respect to the controversies over the interpretation of “Confucian rites” and the missionary strategy of “accommodation,” see Lionel M. Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism: Chinese Traditions and Universal Civilization* (Durham, N.C., 1997); Mungello, *Curious Land*; Standaert, *Handbook*, 309–21; Paul Rule, *K'ung-tzu or Confucius? The Jesuit Interpretation of Confucianism* (Sydney, 1986); *The Chinese Rites Controversy: Its History and Meaning*, ed. David Mungello (Nettetal, Germany, 1994); Jonathan D. Spence, *The Memory Palace of Matteo Ricci* (New York, 1984); and George Harold Dunne (for an accessible introduction), *Generation of Giants: The Story of the Jesuits in China in the Last Decades of the Ming Dynasty* (Notre Dame, Ind., 1962). See also *East Meets West: The Jesuits in China, 1582–1773*, ed. Charles E. Ronan and Bonnie B. C. Oh (Chicago, 1988); Arnold H. Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin: The Jesuits at the Court of China* (Berkeley, 1942), esp. 119–75; the first few essays in *China and Europe: Images and Influences in Sixteenth to Eighteenth Centuries*, ed. Thomas H. C. Lee (Hong Kong, 1991); and Colin Mackerras, *Sinophiles and Sinophobes: Western Views of China, Literary Anthologies of Asia* (Oxford, 2000). For an incomparable resource for work on Jesuit Chinese texts, see 耶穌會羅馬檔案館明清天主教文獻 (Ming Qing Catholic texts from the Roman archives of the Society of Jesus), eds. Nicolas Standaert (鐘鳴旦) and Adrian Dudink (杜鼎克) (Taipei, 2002).

5. As Kircher reiterates: “when that they [the Fathers of our Society] had read it, they could not sufficiently admire the Providence of the Divine Majesty, that should condescend so far to disclose a Monument of so great Concern for the Conversion of the

Heathen in this Novel Vintage of Christ”; Ogilby, *Several Remarks*, 5; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 8.

6. The precise referent of *Daqin* 大秦 has been the subject of much debate. See Edwin G. Pulleyblank, “The Roman Empire as Known to Han China,” *Journal of Asian Studies* 119, no. 1 (1999): 71–79; Friedrich Hirth, *China and the Roman Orient* (Leipzig, 1885).
7. All of the great (Christian) sinologues up through the early twentieth century either translated or commented on the stele at one point in their careers. Pelliot reviews forty major translations of the stele in the first three hundred years after its disinterment, which does not include many minor or derivative translations, nor any done since 1920, nor the countless reprintings of these translations in commentaries, histories, and memoirs; see Pelliot, *L’inscription nestorienne*, 95–146, and also Havret, *La stèle chrétienne*, 2:325–42. This obsession-filled history, together with the elusively hybrid character of the stele, are undoubtedly what inspired Victor Segalen to use it as the formal model for his book of poems, *Stèles* (1914).  
 Although centuries of sectarian attacks by nonspecialists have tried to cast doubt on the “Jesuit” discovery, there is no longer any question about the authenticity of the monument. For reviews of the biases and misprisions of the doubters, see: Wylie, “The Nestorian Tablet,” *passim*; Pelliot, *L’inscription nestorienne*, 147–66; Havret, *La stèle chrétienne*, 2:262–91; and Mungello, *Curious Land*, 169–71. The fiercely anti-Jesuit Voltaire was the most famous of the doubters over the centuries, who memorably called it one of those “fraudes pieuses” that are too lightly permitted; *Essay sur l’histoire générale et sur les mœurs et l’esprit des nations, depuis Charlemagne jusqu’à nos jours* (Geneva, 1756), 126. Voltaire later returned to the topic of the stele in the fourth of his *Lettres chinoises, indiennes et tartares: à Monsieur Paw* (Paris, 1776). The most persuasive attack (systematically refuted by Wylie) came from Edward-Elbridge Salisbury, “On the genuineness of the so-called Nestorian Monument of Singan-Fu,” *Journal of American Oriental Society* (1853), 3:399–419. That the stele was buried is undoubtedly what saved it from the imperial edict of 845 c.e., which called for the disbanding of all religious orders and the widespread destruction of monasteries, texts, and other religious monuments (just as the burial of Matteo Ricci’s memorial stele would save it from Red Guards on the rampage eleven hundred years later).
8. Thomas Browne, *Pseudodoxia Epidemica* (Oxford, 1996), 1.9.56 and 3.11.201. Browne was a devoted reader of Kircher and refers to him through his writings. In a letter of 2 April 1679 to his son Edward, he quotes an extended passage from *China Illustrata* on ginseng (slightly emending Kircher’s Latin in the process); Thomas Browne, *Works*, ed. Geoffrey Keynes (Chicago, 1964), 4:§66. Kircher was also eagerly read by members of the Royal Society; see Conor Reilly, *Athanasius Kircher S. J.: Master of a Hundred Arts, 1602–1680* (Rome, 1974), 99–112. In a diary entry of 1667, Samuel Pepys writes of buying “a most excellent book with rare cuts”; cited in Rowbotham, *Missionary and Mandarin*, 279.
9. *Wunder*-seekers are also richly rewarded here with the customary fare of Kircher’s quirky delights, such as a description of the serpent stone and its antivenomous virtues; a full-page illustration of the parts of Brahma’s body from which the Hindu universe issued forth; and a sober explanation that just because tortoises in Henan may have winglike webs on their feet, this does not mean that they can fly—a point that is illustrated with a tortoise shooting through the air like a Chinese Gamara as another trudges along the ground; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 81, 85, 205.
10. “*Ac prima quidem Pars exhibet marmoreum illud monumentum toto Orbe celeberrimum, cujus causâ hoc Opus à nobis cæptum fuit*”; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, sig. 2v. The Latin *monumentum* may be either text or stone, both of which senses are appropriate here. The monument also

occupies pride of place in the posthumous catalog of Kircher's museum as the first fold-out engraving (the very plate used in *China Illustrata*), appearing even before the Egyptian obelisks; Georgio de Sepibus, *Romani Collegii Societatus Jesu Musaeum celeberrimum, cuius magnum antiquariae rei, statuarum imaginum, picturarumque . . . P. Athanasius Kircherus Soc. Jesu, novis & raris inventis locupletatum, compluriumque principum curiosis donariis magno rerum apparatu instruxit . . .* (Amsterdam, 1678), 8 f. One may well wonder whether the customary truncation of the title as "*China Illustrata*" rather than as "*China Monumentis*" may have as much to do with a desire to view the work as an integral proto-ethnographic portrait as with grammatical convention.

11. For background, scholarship, and further bibliographies on Kircher, see *The Great Art of Knowing: The Baroque Encyclopedia of Athanasius Kircher*, ed. Daniel Stolzenberg (Stanford, 2001); Ingrid D. Rowland, *The Ecstatic Journey: Athanasius Kircher in Baroque Rome* (Chicago, 2000); Dino Pastine, *La nascita dell'idolatria: L'Oriente religioso di Athanasius Kircher* (Florence, 1978); Jocelyn Godwin, *Athanasius Kircher: A Renaissance Man and the Quest for Lost Knowledge* (London, 1979). See also the recent volume of essays edited by Paula Findlen, *Athanasius Kircher: The Last Man Who Knew Everything* (New York, 2004). For work specifically on Kircher's *China Illustrata*, see Haun Saussy, "China Illustrata: The Universe in a Cup of Tea," in Stolzenberg, *The Great Art of Knowing*, 105–14; Florence Hsia, "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*," in Findlen, *Athanasius Kircher*, 383–404; Boleslaw Szczesniak (to be used cautiously since it contains many errors), "Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*," *Osiris* 10 (1952): 385–411; and J. Michelle Molina, "True Lies: Athanasius Kircher's *China Illustrata*, and the Life Story of a Mexican Mystic," in Findlen, *Athanasius Kircher*, 365–81.
12. Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 12 f, 13–21, 22–28, 29–35. The first complete translation of the inscription to be published in a European language was an Italian version (based on an earlier Portuguese version) that Kircher used as the basis for his own translation: the anonymous *Dichiaratione di una pietra antica, scritta et solpita con l'infrascritte lettere, ritrovata nel Regno della Cina* (Rome, 1631). I say "Boym" as a shorthand to avoid confusion in the discussion to follow, but we should bear in mind the lesson of Jonathan Spence's observation that we too often speak of the translation of Euclid's geometry into Chinese as the "triumph of Matteo Ricci" rather than as a "triumph of friendship and cooperation" with Xu Guangqi 徐光啓 (Paul), since this kind of work was always done by the Jesuits in close collaboration with Chinese scholars, and could not have been done without them; Jonathan Spence, "Claims and Counter-Claims: The Kangxi Emperor and the Europeans (1661–1722)," in Mungello, *The Chinese Rites Controversy*, 19. Boym mentions in his letter that he had help in preparing the text from Andreas Zheng (his traveling companion); but the headnote on the transcription indicates that it was copied from the original (probably a rubbing) by the hand of one "Mattheus, a native of China" in 1664 (*Hanc Tabulam propria manu ex autographo descripsit Mattheus Sina Oriundus ex Sianfu Romae Anno 1664*). Since Boym delivered his manuscript to Kircher in 1653 and died in 1659, he cannot have been involved in the final preparation of the text. My guess is that Boym prepared a superscripted verbatim manuscript keyed to a superscripted copy of the inscription, and that Kircher later put them into four-part tables out of his own ingenuity. It is notable that Boym does not mention the grid in any way, but refers only to the numbering. The final transcription was prepared by someone who did not know how to write Chinese properly.
13. "*De triplici Interpretationum Modo & Ratione Nota ad Lectorem*" (Note to the reader on the method and reason of the triple interpretations), in Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 10–12.
14. Kircher gives "*Chun yue*" as the pronunciation for the single character *yue* 月 ("Luna," moon), which is an error in the pronunciation table that Kircher was in no position

- to correct; he gives *wang* 王 (king) when trying to write *sheng* 生 (“Vita,” life), dropping the stroke that distinguishes them; and he gives “instituit” (founded) as the translation for *da* 大 (large), slipping a notch on the grid to misread 18:8 for 18:9; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 11. Cf. Mungello who describes similar errors in Kircher’s final section on the hieroglyphical nature of Chinese; Mungello, *Curious Land*, 153–56. Interestingly, Mungello describes Kircher’s edition as an efficient presentation still useful for consultation—which is precisely, I would argue, the effect that it may have been designed to create in even the most discriminating readers (167).
15. 景教碑, cols. 1–2; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 29.
  16. Ogilby, *Several Remarks*, 11. The Latin reads: “commovit Chaos, fecit duo *Kīs* (hoc est, duas virtutes, seu duas qualitates dictas *Inyam*; Commentator habet, duo principia) fecit mutationem in abyssu, id est, mutavit tenebras, comparuit coelum & terram”; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 29.
  17. See Standaert’s notes on “Creation” under “Key Theological Issues” for the Late Ming and early Qing, where he offers this summary: “The theme of Creation (*ex nihilo*, at the beginning of time, by an act of God’s will) played an important role as one of the distinctive features of the Christian faith, and rightly so, because no comparable concept existed in the indigenous Chinese tradition. In that tradition cosmogony is described in mechanical terms, as a phased process of polarisation and diversification, starting from an original state of undifferentiated being. The primordial state of homogeneity . . . polarised into the complementary forces of *Yin* and *Yang*, from which the Five Elements evolved: at the end of the process the world of the ‘myriad things’ has taken shape”; Standaert, *Handbook*, 646–47.
  18. These two points are stressed by Jacques Gernet, *China and the Christian Impact: A Conflict of Cultures*, trans. Janet Lloyd (Cambridge, 1985), 208.
  19. Matteo Ricci (利瑪竇), *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven (T’ien-chu shih-i)*, trans. Douglas Lancashire and Peter Kuo-chen Hu., bilingual (Taipei, 1985), 198–201, and 76.
  20. Giulio Aleni (艾瑞略), *Wanwu zhenyuan* 萬物真原 (The true origin of all things; 1628), (Zi-ka-wei, 1791), 9–12. We should also observe that, whereas Kircher’s paraphrase had associated this *yuan feng* 原風 (primordial wind) with the controversial *yuan qi* 原氣 (primordial material energy) by translating the term as “Chaos” (quoted earlier), Boym gives them separately as “<sup>50</sup> originis <sup>51</sup> spiritum” (the spirit of origin), which more strongly suggests the holy spirit. Is the god in question here, then, “drumming up the primordial wind” or “stirring and bringing forth the holy spirit”? To add another layer, Pelliot has observed that this unusual term *yuan feng* 原風 (primordial wind) appears in the Buddhist cosmogony in the opening lines of the Dhūta Temple Inscription 頭陀碑, from which the author of the inscription undoubtedly borrowed it. Indeed, as with other such examples that I will offer, I would suggest that *yuan feng* 原風 might have been meant to suggest the Hebrew *ruach* (breath, spirit) and the Chinese *yuan qi* 原氣 at one and the same time, even if the readings are not compatible. See Pelliot, *L’inscription nestorienne*, 189.
  21. In his brief Chinese commentary printed along with the text of the monument, Manoel Dias Jr. presents a catechism of many of the orthodox terms on the monument as though they were perfectly manifest; Manoel Dias Jr. (陽瑪諾), *Tang jingjiao liu xing zhongguo bei song zheng quan* 唐景教流行中國碑頌正詮 (The correct explanation of the inscription of the Tang monument on the introduction of the luminous doctrine into China) (Hangzhou, 1644).
  22. Pelliot favors the less literal reading of the first part and speculates that the second part (which he thought “une expression très acceptable pour rendre l’idée de ‘Création’”)



- was probably plundered from the *Wenxuan* 文選 (Literature anthology) rather than directly from the *Daode jing*; see Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne*, 173 and 186–87. I follow his notes on this phrase.
23. My emphasis. I omit the original numbering here to avoid confusion with the endnotes, which reads: “<sup>23</sup> & <sup>24</sup> *fecti ex nihilo* <sup>25</sup> *excellentissimè* . . .”; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 22.
  24. *Ibid.*, 29.
  25. Athanasius Kircher, *Prodromus Coptussive Aegyptiacus* (Rome, 1636), 54. Recall that Kircher’s text is based on the first complete published translation, in Italian, which reads “*creò le cose*”; *Dichiaratione di una pietra antica*, reproduced in *appendice* in Havret, *La stèle chrétienne*, 3:78.
  26. Haun Saussy, “In the Workshop of Equivalences: Translation, Institutions, Media in the Jesuit Re-formation of China,” in *Great Walls*, 15–34.
  27. *Ibid.*, 32.
  28. Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York, 1985), 79 and 82.
  29. For a representative critique, see Lydia He Liu, *Translingual Practice: Literature, National Culture, and Translated Modernity—China, 1900–1937* (Stanford, 1995), 10–27.
  30. Walter Simon, “The Attribution to Michael Boym of Two Early Achievements of Western Sinology,” *Asia Major*, n.s. 7 (1959): 165–69. See “Elogium 26” in the front matter of Kircher’s *Oedipus*, where he is praised for, among other things, having innumerable more disciples than Confucius had, first in Chinese then in a numbered word-for-word Latin version; Athanasius Kircher, *Oedipus Aegyptiacus* (Rome, 1652), sig. [+++ . . .] 2 f.
  31. See St. Jerome, *Letters*, trans. and ed. Philip Schaff and Henry Wace, *A Select Library of Nicene and Post-Nicene Fathers of the Christian Church*, second series (New York, 1890–1900), 6:§LVII.
  32. Ogilby, *Several Remarks*, 11; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 29. Havret, *La stèle nestorienne*, conjectures that the original Portuguese draft behind the Italian draft behind Kircher’s Latin version was done by Jacobo Rho (1:328 n. 2); cf. Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne*, 104–10.
  33. “The profound vocation of Classical language has always been to make a ‘tableau’: whether it be as natural discourse, collection of truth, description of things, or encyclopedic dictionary. It thus exists only to be transparent”; Michel Foucault, *Les Mots et les choses: une archéologie des sciences humaines* (Paris, 1966), 322.
  34. Ogilby, *Several Remarks*, 2; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 2.
  35. For an illustration of the first messy page of the *Sapientia Sinica* see Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucianism*, 115. See also Mungello, *Curious Land*, 294–96.
  36. For more on Kircher and seventeenth-century universal language systems, see Nick Wilding, “‘If You Have a Secret, Either Keep It, or Reveal It’: Cryptography and Universal Language,” in Stolzenberg, *The Great Art of Knowing*, 93–104; and also Haun Saussy, “Magnetic Language: Athanasius Kircher and Communication,” in Findlen, *Athanasius Kircher*, 263–81.
  37. For more on Kircher and Babel, see Anthony Grafton, “Kircher’s Chronology,” in Findlen, *Athanasius Kircher*, 171–87; and Mungello, *Curious Land*, 174–207.
  38. On the philological and philosophical roots of “syntax” and its use as a trope for theorizing translation, see Saussy, *Great Walls*, 37.
  39. Kircher, *La Chine illustrée*, 37–47.
  40. We should not make the mistake, however, of thinking that Kircher categorically dismisses the Chinese language as inferior since he also praises Boym’s version above his own translation for “being indeed more elegant and proper, and likewise more

conformable to the *Chinesian* Language; and although for that cause it seem less polite in our Tongue, yet nevertheless is it most eloquent, and having respect to the Phrase and Stile of the *Chinese* Speech, is by such as profess themselves Masters in the understanding of that Tongue, judged the most deserving praise of all others"; Ogilby, *Several Remarks*, 16; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 34. This sentiment conforms precisely to the rhetoric of simultaneously valorizing the accuracy of the verbatim version while also valorizing the superior intelligibility of the paraphrase. For a brilliant discussion related to this topic, on the problematics of pidgin and literal translation, see Haun Saussy's essay, "Always Multiple Translation," in *Great Walls*, 75–90, reprinted from *Tokens of Exchange: The Problem of Translation in Global Circulations*, ed. Lydia Liu (Durham, N.C., 1999), 107–23.

41. Guillaume Pauthier's mid-nineteenth-century study improves on Kircher's method by dividing his own four-part apparatus so that the relevant portions of each part appear together on the same page, with Latin providing the *verbum e verbo* and French the *sensus de sensu*; Guillaume Pauthier, *L'inscription Syro-Chinoise de Si-ngan-fou* (Paris, 1858). Havret also includes a Latin version. More generally, one thinks of the famous trilingual editions of the classics by Séraphin Couvreur (which also include romanized pronunciations, exactly like Kircher), who writes in one preface: "La traduction latine, en suivant l'ordre de mots chinois, fait connaître la structure de la phrase, la valeur de chaque mot: double avantage qu'on ne pouvait demander à la traduction française"; Séraphin Couvreur, *Choix de documents: lettres officielles, proclamations, édits, mémoires, inscriptions, . . . Texte chinois avec traduction en français et en latin* (Ho Kien Fou, 1894), 1.
42. Those for the Christian god appear in cols. 1, 4, 5, and 24. On *que zi* 闕字 see the note by Forte, who marks them in his version of the text; Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne*, 389 n, 497–503.
43. Dias Jr., *Tang jingjiao* 唐景教, *passim*.
44. For a study of Yang Tingyun and the Jesuit response to him, see Standaert, *Yang Tingyun: Confucian and Christian in Late Ming China* (Leiden, 1988).
45. According to the diary of Joachim Bouvet, it was later used for precisely this purpose in a discussion with Emperor Kangxi in 1690, who requested a copy of the inscription when told about it; Bibliothèque nationale MSS français 17240, fols. 272v–73, cited in John D. Witek, "Understanding the Chinese: A Comparison of Matteo Ricci and the French Jesuit Mathematicians Sent by Louis XIV," in Ronan and Oh, *East Meets West*, 86.
46. The fetishistic appropriation of the monument is not unique to the seventeenth-century Jesuits, but seems symptomatic of its treatment by (non-Chinese) sinologists and (Christian) sinophiles. As soon as the monument was convincingly identified as "Nestorian" in the Victorian period, its "Protestantism" was continually stressed, as in, for example, the remark by Alexander Williamson (Minister and Agent of the National Bible Society of Scotland) upon his pilgrimage to the monument in the 1860s: "The preserving care of a wise Providence was the first thought in our minds, for this tablet not only enunciates all the leading doctrines of our holy religion, but is a most important witness in favour of our faith in opposition both to the heathen and Romanist, as it shows that the Protestant form of Christianity is not of yesterday"; Alexander Williamson, *Journeys in North China, Manchuria, and East Mongolia; with some account of Corea* (London, 1870), 1:381.
47. Havret defends the Jesuits for completely ignoring these dragons on the grounds that they were a typical decorative feature of Tang monuments and therefore unworthy of note. Yet the crown is notable at the very least for its excellent preservation (thanks to



the interment); and it seems just as likely that this most salient feature of the monument may have seemed too profanely “Chinese” to be mentioned. In any case, considering that the dimensions of the stele are repeatedly described in detail, the omission is very curious. On the other hand, Kircher describes the cross in great detail even though it is so tiny that it is barely visible in most photographs. It should be noted that the intricacy in the design of these dragons (a hornless variety called the *chi* 螭) made them notoriously difficult for casual viewers to distinguish as such. Indeed, sketches of the monument through the nineteenth century all fail to make sense of the motif (sometimes rendered as headless avian creatures), during which time it was evidently rumored in Europe that they may represent Cherubim. See Havret, *La stèle chrétienne*, 2:141–42.

48. “Verum inspicienti illa[m] narratione[m] fraus Jesuitica no[n] obscura erit. Nam saxum esse suppositu[m], & à Jesuitis ad decipie[n]dos Sine[n]ses ac thesauris exuendos confictu[m] patet”; Georg Horn, *De Originibus Americanus* (The Hague, 1652), 495.
49. “Monumentum illud a recentiori quodam semi-Christiano pariter ac semi-Sinico Doctore fuisse adornatum”; Theophil [Gottlieb] Spizelius, *De re literaria Sinensium Commentarius* (Leiden, 1660), 160, cited in Havret, *La stèle chrétienne*, 2:265 n. According to Mungello, Spitzel attacked the monument because it did not fit his claims about the silence of the Chinese on the “Creator”; Mungello, *Curious Land*, 170.
50. Ogilby (emended), *Several Remarks*, 1–2; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 1–2.
51. Ogilby, *Several Remarks*, 2; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 2. As late as the second half of the nineteenth century, at least one writer was defending Kircher’s original presentation against its recent identification as Nestorian (in the work of such sinologues as Wylie), devoting some two dozen pages to arguing that the inscription is just as Catholic as Kircher claimed it to be (“Olopen était probablement un missionnaire catholique syrien ou arménien”); Dabry de Thiersant, *Le Catholicisme en Chine au VIIIe Siècle de notre ère, avec une nouvelle traduction de l’inscription de Sy-ngan-fou* (Paris, 1877), 30 and 12–36. De Thiersant’s “nouvelle traduction” follows Kircher closely.
52. “Quicquid sit, constat Nestorianos in Cataja & Sini ante multa secula invaluisse, ac Imperatores earu[m] gentium ad fide[m] Christiana[m] convertisse”; Horn, *De Originibus*, 495. For background on the distinct discursive constructions of China and Cataja (Cathay), see my “Caterwauling Cataians: The Genealogy of a Gloss,” *Shakespeare Quarterly* 54 (Spring 2003): 1–28, esp. 4–6.
53. Horn, *De Originibus*, 496.
54. Samuel Purchas, *Purchas his Pilgrimage. Or Relations of the world and the religions observed in all ages and places discovered, from the Creation vnto this present. . . .* (London, 1626); cited from the Hakluyt Society reprint, *Hakluytus Posthumus* (Glasgow, 1905), 1:358. Purchas is hardly a disinterested commentator; to be sure; but his conclusion reflects an accurate reading of the extant texts of Marco Polo’s *Travels*.
55. Andreas Müller, *Disquisitio Geographica & Historica, de Chataja, . . .* (Berlin, 1671), 117 and 122. For a modern edition see Henry Yule and Henri Cordier, eds., *The Travels of Marco Polo: The Complete Yule-Cordier Edition* (1920) (New York, 1993), 2:177 and 192.
56. Matteo Ricci and Nicholas Trigault, *De Christiana expeditione apud Sinas* (Rome, 1615).
57. Ogilby, *Several Remarks*, 8 and 9.
58. His counter-reformation arguments are chiefly concentrated in chapter five, on “The Articles of faith and other rites and ceremonies contained in the Monument” (*De Articulis fidei caeterisque ceremoniis & ritibus in Monumento contentis*), where Kircher argues, for example, that since it would have been pointless for the Christians described on the monument to pray for both “the living and the dead” if they did not believe in purgatory, then “the Heterodox should not be ashamed to learn from this monument the

- consensus of the ancient and modern Church [*veteris Ecclesiae cum moderna*]”; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 38. Such arguments assert the orthodoxy of the stone while begging the question of Nestorianism.
59. In an amusing twist of sculptural history, it happens that the so-called St. Thomas cross at Mylapur is *also* a “Nestorian” cross, which bears a certain resemblance to the cross on the monument. But Kircher had to rely on imperfect sketches of that cross, so that, believing them to be *unlike*, Kircher *changed* his depiction of the cross from the monument to conform to his sketch of the other. With accurate sketches, he could have shown them both and suggested that *neither one* was Nestorian.
  60. Junjirō Takakusu, “The Name of ‘Messiah’ Found in a Buddhist Book, the Nestorian Missionary Adam, Presbyter, Papas of China, Translating a Buddhist Sūtra,” *T’oung-pao* 7 (Dec. 1896): 589–91. I use “Adam 景淨” for convenience, whereas he may have been the leader of a group of collaborators on the inscription; see Pelliot, *Recherches*, 13–14.
  61. For a brief note on the form of *pianli wen* 騙體文 (paired style writing) with an illustration from the stele, see Tang Li, *A Study of the History of Nestorian Christianity and Its Literature in Chinese* (Frankfurt, 2002), 126–27. See also the translator’s note in Ignatius Ch’ien-li Ying, “The Nestorian Tablet of Sian-fu Translated into English” (1928), *Fu Jen Studies*, no. 2 (1969): 1–15, esp. 4–5.
  62. See Forte’s appendix, “A Literary Model for Adam: The Dhūta Monastery Inscription,” in Pelliot, *L’inscription nestorienne*, 473–87.
  63. For an excellent explanation of the political rivalries and the specific Greek terms through which the controversy was debated, see Moffett, *A History of Christianity in Asia*, 169–215.
  64. Legge, *The Nestorian Monument*, 42 and 5 n. Consider also the following: “L’avènement de Jésus-Christ est ensuite exposé en des termes qui trahissent l’opinion des nestoriens sur le mystère de l’Incarnation”; Huc, *Le christianisme en Chine*, 2:72; “L’expression du texte chinois: 分身 *fēn chūn*, ‘diviser sa personne,’ correspond au dogme nestorien des deux personnes en J. C.”; Pauthier, *L’inscription Syro-Chinoise*, 7; and Pelliot, who translates the term as “la personne divisée” and wrote “le sens paraît cependant absolument certain,” although his full commentary on the term was never written; Pelliot, *L’inscription nestorienne*, 204.
  65. Havret, *La stèle chrétienne*, 3:35–39.
  66. 景教碑, cols. 4 and 24; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 23 and 27.
  67. Ogilby, *Several Remarks*, 11 and 15; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 29 and 33.
  68. The old testament god is also called *Aluohe* 阿羅訶 in the cosmogony discussed earlier. The term is splendidly overdetermined insofar as it not only corresponds to *Alaha*, the Syriac cognate of the Hebrew *Elohim*, but was also used by Buddhist translators interchangeably with the more popular term *Aluohan* 阿羅漢 to render the Sanskrit *Arhat*, a divine being in the Buddhist pantheon. Adam 景淨, laboring in the workshop of equivalences, evidently struck upon this term as a very close transcription of the sacred name (*verbum e verbo*) that also conveniently carried divine connotations (*sensus de sensu*). A thousand years later, much of the debate in the so-called Terms Controversy revolved around the same issues of how to translate “god” into Chinese.
  69. Emmanuel Diaz et al., *Lettere Dell’Ethiopia Dell’Anno 1626 sino al Marzo del 1627, e della Cina Dell’Anno 1625 sino al Febraro del 1626. Con vna breue Relatione del viaggio al Regno di TVNQYIM, nuouamente scoperto, mandate al molto rev. padre Mutio Vitelleschi, generale della Compagnia di Giesu* (Rome, 1629), 116–20.
  70. 景教碑, col. 10. Cf. these other translations of the same passage: “La Voie n’a pas de nom éternel; le saint n’a pas de mode éternel. Ils instituent la doctrine suivant les ré-

gions et sauvent mystérieusement les vivants” (Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne*, 175); “The Way had not, at all times and in all places, the selfsame name; the Sage had not, at all times and in all places, the selfsame human body. [Heaven] caused a suitable religion to be instituted for every region and clime so that each one of the races of mankind might be saved” (Saeki, *The Nestorian Documents*, 57); “The Doctrine (Tao) bears no fixed name and the Sage resides in no definite person. Religions are founded to suit the various regions of the earth, so that salvation may be within the reach of all living beings” (Ying, “The Nestorian Tablet of Sian-fu,” 9).

71. This reading was accepted by the early nineteenth century, as, for example, in Abel Rémusat’s influential work: “Ce prince n’y tient pas tout-à-fait le langage d’une personne véritablement convertie au christianisme: ses expressions sont plutôt celles d’un philosophe chinois, disposé à croire que toutes les religions sont bonnes suivant les temps et les lieux”; Abel Rémusat, *Nouveaux Mélanges Asiatiques* (Paris, 1829), 2:90.
72. Legge, *The Nestorian Monument*, 11; Wylie, “The Nestorian Tablet,” 282. The word *dao* 道, for example, is often used in this more general sense in Confucian texts, such as in the opening lines of the *Zhong yong* 中庸 (Doctrine of the mean).
73. Klaproth Leontievskii’s notoriously bad nineteenth-century translation, however, amusingly illustrates the *telos* for such a reading by refiguring the *dao* 道 as the Bible, which the emperor has already accepted as the true faith (in Charles Marchal’s French version of it): “Ce livre, qui n’a pas de titre déterminé et dont les saintes doctrines ne connaissent aucunes bornes, doit être admis comme dogme de la foi, vu sa bienfaisante influence sur le genre humain”; *La Croix de Chine*, trans. Charles Marchal (Paris, 1853), 16. The French version was published in *Annales de la philosophie chrétienne* (1853), to the later embarrassment of the editors.
74. 景教碑, col. 8. This phrase posed little difficulty for the Jesuits, who translated *jingjiao* 景教 both as a set term and also *literally* (in the paraphrase): “whereupon as necessary it was intitled *Kim kiao*, that is, The Great and Perspicacious Law”; Ogilby, *Several Remarks*, 12; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 30.
75. In what may serve as an example of how the first Jesuit translations transformed the Chinese text and context into the Catholic *reine Sprache* of the stele, an anonymous French version (1628) based on Nicholas Trigault’s unpublished Latin version (“faite de mot en mot de Chinois en Latin”) gives the inscription only up to this point (before the edict) and ends dramatically with these very lines, as follows: “63. Si la Loi n’est sainte, elle ne peut être appelée grande. / 64. Et la Sainteté ne peut être appelée grande si elle n’est conforme à la Loi. / 65. Mais en celle-ci la Sainteté répond à la Loi et la Loi à la Sainteté”; *Advis certain d’une plus ample découverte du Royaume de Catai* (Paris, 1628), reprinted in Havret, *La Stèle chrétienne*, 3:72–74.
76. Indeed, for the two occurrences of *dao* just discussed, Pelliot gives two different translations: “la sagesse” when Adam 景靜 uses it and “La Voie” when the emperor uses it; Pelliot, *L’inscription nestorienne*, 175.
77. Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 30; Ogilby, *Several Remarks*, 12. Alvarez Semedo’s independent translation of the Chinese, which he acknowledges is different from the version in *Prodromus Coptus*, nevertheless coincides with Kircher at this point, except that the second half of the first phrase is curiously missing, which is precisely where the crux lies: “The true law hath no determinate name. The Ministers thereof go about in every part to teach it unto the world, having no other aim, but to be profitable to those that live in it”; Alvarez Semedo, *The History of the Great and Renowned Monarchy of China . . . Now put into English by a Person of quality* (London, 1655), 160.
78. Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 24.

79. For readings of Foucault's reading of Jorge Luis Borges's "Chinese encyclopedia," see my "Visible Cities: The Heterotopic Utopia of China in Early Modern European Writing," *Genre* 30 (Fall/Winter 1997): 105–34; and Zhang Longxi 張龍溪, *Mighty Opposites: From Dichotomies to Differences in the Comparative Study of China* (Stanford, 1998).
80. Dalquié, *La Chine illustrée*, 40.
81. Ogilby (emended), *Several Remarks*, 12; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 30.
82. Once these holy ones are allowed to change their *locus* rather than their "mode," the translators can then carry over *sheng* 聖 (sage/*sancti*) as the subject of the following clause so that *sui* 隨 (according to) *fang* 方 (a place) becomes *excurrere* (to run out) *omnes partes* (to all parts) and *decurrere* (run down) *Mundum* (to the world). In sum, 隨方設教 "According to the locale, [the inhabitants] establish [their own] doctrines" becomes in Boym's version, "[The holy ones] run about the World propagating [the] Law" (*decurrunt Mundum proponendo Legem*); and in the paraphrase: "[the Saints] run to all Parts that they may instruct the World" (*excurrunt ad omnes partes, ut Mundum doceant*).
83. "*Transumptum lapidis antiquissimi ante annos 994 erecti, hoc anno 1625 inventi, latine factum a quodam Soc. Jesu, fere de verbo ad verbum*"; Havret was the first to transcribe and publish this manuscript in *La stèle chrétienne*, 3:68 f.
84. Jensen shows that by 1615 Trigault was passionate enough about the controversy that he strategically edited Ricci's writings (suppressing some passages and printing others that Ricci had struck out) in order to push the accommodationist cause by misrepresenting to Europeans the truly religious nature of the sacrificial rites to Confucius; Jensen, *Manufacturing Confucius*, 63–70. For the attribution of the 1625 Latin text see Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne*, 98; and Havret, *La stèle chrétienne*, 2:325 f. The immediately following Italian translations of the rescript (in 1626 and 1631) give the terms that will become familiar in Kircher: "Non ha la vera Legge nome determinato: nè li Santi hanno luogo proprio doue dimorino; e però corrono per tutte le parti, per ammaestrare il Mondo, procurando d'esser' in tutto vtili alla Repubblica"; Diaz, *Lettere . . . Della Cina*, 18; and "La vera Legge non ha nome determinato, nè i Santi hanno luogo determinato doue assistano: corrono à tutte le parti, per insegnar' al mondo: hauendo l'occhio ad esser profittuoli à tutti i venti"; *Dichiaratione di una pietra antica*, reprinted in Havret, *La stèle chrétienne*, 3:80.
85. For these two examples and a discussion of *ti* 體, see Standaert, *Handbook*, 647–48.
86. Aleni 艾儒略, *Mi sa ji yilue* 彌撒祭義略 (A brief explanation of the Sacrifice of the Mass) (Fuzhou, [1629]), 4–6.
87. My thanks to an anonymous reader for suggesting this paragraph. This usage of *sheng* 聖 to translate the idea of a "Saint" or of "holiness" in the abstract later became so common among missionaries and in translations of the Bible that modern Chinese dictionaries now include this meaning. Thus, in a very real sense *sheng* 聖 now really means "Saint" in certain contexts, its doubleness during this period having been flattened by custom; see the translator's introduction to Ricci, *The True Meaning of the Lord of Heaven*, 28.
88. *Tang hui yao* 唐會要, edited by Wang Pu 王浦 (c. 961), 49:10–12. The rescript is reprinted in Sacki, *The Nestorian Documents*, 288. Forte devotes several interesting pages to reconstructing the "true" edict on the basis that neither the *Tang hui yao* 唐會要 nor the version on the stele is perfectly correct, but that the latter is more accurate; Pelliot, *L'inscription nestorienne*, 349–67.
89. Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 30.
90. 景教碑, col. 10.
91. 莊子, 雜篇, 外物第二十六. Cf. Watson, *Chuang Tzu*, 140.
92. Ogilby (emended), *Several Remarks*, 13; Kircher, *China Illustrata*, 31.